

UNIVERSITY *of* LIMERICK

O L L S C O I L L U I M N I G H



YOUR PASSPORT TO  
SEXUAL HEALTH

# Your Passport to Sexual Health

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# Introduction

The Sexual Health Working Group was set up to support the UL student body with their own personal health needs. The Group has put in place different structures to provide information on areas such as sexual awareness, safe sexual practice, sexuality, crisis pregnancy, and sexual assault. These include campaigns, promotions, articles in An Focal and seminars to make people more aware of their sexual health and take more care of themselves, not only in college but also in their everyday lives.

The following Passport To Sexual Health has been developed for the 600 or so students from UL that travel from Ireland to take part in Cooperative Education, Erasmus/ Socrates programme or indeed partake in programmes like the J1 in the USA. This

guide, which is your 'Passport to Sexual Health', contains advice about contraception before you depart, information about Health Insurance,



and what to do if you experience STI symptoms while you are abroad. We hope that this guide will help you have a happy, healthy international experience.



## Planning Ahead

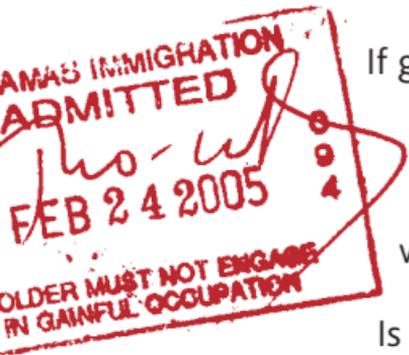
Before going abroad, you will have to make plans to sort travel, finance and accommodation. In the same way, we recommend that you take time to plan your sexual health needs so as to ensure that you are ready to head away on what may be the adventure of a lifetime.

The key principle to remember is that not all countries will offer you the same services as you are entitled to at home. So you should consider some of the following questions before you go abroad - some of which can be answered before you go but some questions will only be answered when you reach your destination.

### General Health

Are you going to an EU country? If so, see the section on the EHIC Card.





If going to a non-EU Country what cover do you have?

What are the health standards where I'm going?

Is the medical care similar to home, worse, better?

Does my study abroad university have medical facilities?

Do you have a long-term illness that you need to discuss and plan with your GP before going abroad?

Do you take medication? If so will you need to ensure that you have adequate supplies while abroad?

### Sexual Practice

Are there particular cultural values that you need to be aware of with regard to sexual practices?

What is the legal age of consent?

Are there sexual practices that are considered illegal in your country of destination?



## Contraception, Pregnancy, Abortion

Are there family planning clinics or facilities available to the public?

How available are contraceptives? Do I need a prescription for contraception where I'm going?

How available is abortion?

## Sexual Health Risks - STIs, HIV & AIDS

What are the major sexual health risks you face different to at home?

Are HIV, AIDS and other STI's more prevalent where I'm going?

The University recommends that, if you are sexually active, you should sort out your contraception at least two to three months before departure. Make an appointment with the Student Health Centre consultants and discuss your needs and any questions you might have relating to your health before you go abroad. Below you'll find an example of contraception that is available in the UL Health Centre:



# Types of Contraception

Method of Contraception	What is it?	Advantages	Disadvantages	Effectiveness
<b>Condom (male)</b>	Thin sheath that fits over a man's erect penis during sexual contact. Acts as a physical barrier preventing bodily fluids from passing between sexual partners, preventing pregnancy and/or the transmission of STIs.	Easily purchased without prescription at chemists, family planning clinics or from vending machines in many bars/nightclubs. Reduces the risk of STIs, including HIV.	Must be put on when penis becomes erect, before any contact with the vagina. Use with care as they can slip off or split. Men should withdraw as soon as they have ejaculated, be careful not to spill any semen. Cannot be used with oil-based products, as these will damage the rubber.	Approximately 94-98% effective against pregnancy with correct and careful use. The failure rate can be much higher if condoms are not used properly or consistently. Only use condoms approved with a international or CE quality mark on the packet.

## Condom (female)

Female condoms are seven-inch-long pouches of polyurethane with two flexible rings. Should be inserted into the vagina before intercourse and cover the cervix, vagina and the area around the vagina. Act by preventing sperm from entering the vagina.

Can be inserted at any time before sex. Stronger than the male condom and can be used with oil-based products. Particularly useful for women who suffer from allergic reactions to the spermicidal lubricants used with condoms. Reduces the risk of contracting STIs, including HIV.

They can slip, so you need to be sure that the penis enters the condom and is not inserted between the condom and the vaginal wall.

Approximately 95% effective against pregnancy, if used correctly. If not used correctly, the chance of pregnancy can be much higher.

## Method of Contraception

### What is it?

#### Combined Pill

The combined pill is a hormonal method of contraception. It contains two hormones (oestrogen and progesterone), which prevent an egg from being released by a woman's ovary each month.

### Advantages

Effective method of contraceptive  
Can reduce pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS), period pain and heavy periods.  
Protects against cancer of the ovary and womb.  
No devices or spermicides are necessary, so it does not restrict spontaneity. The combined pill is suitable for healthy, non-smokers up to the menopause.

### Disadvantages

Not suitable for women with high blood pressure, circulatory disease or diabetes or some other medical conditions.  
Women who are overweight may be advised to use another method of contraception.  
Not reliable if taken more than 12 hours late, after vomiting and diarrhoea, or if taking other drugs, such as

### Effectiveness

Approximately 99% effective, if taken correctly. If pills are forgotten and no precautions are taken it is less effective. A recommended approach when appropriate is to use the 'double dutch' method of contraception - the pill to prevent pregnancy and condoms to prevent STIs.

			<p>antibiotics. May cause some side effects. These are generally temporary. There is no protection against STIs.</p>	
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<p><b>Contraceptive Injection</b></p>	<p>Injection of hormones that provides a longer acting alternative to the pill. It works by slowly releasing the hormone progesterone into the body to prevent ovulation.</p>	<p>An injection lasts for 12 weeks and is a very reliable method of contraception. It offers some protection against cancer of the womb.</p>	<p>You must have the next injection on time, every three months, or it becomes ineffective. You may experience irregular bleeding. Periods often become irregular</p>	<p>More than 99% effective, if taken correctly</p>
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Method of Contraception	What is it?	Advantages	Disadvantages	Effectiveness
<b>Contraceptive Injection</b> (continued)			<p>or stop entirely.</p> <p>Regular periods and fertility may take a year or more to return after stopping the injections.</p> <p>No protection against STIs.</p> <p>Some women may gain weight on the injection.</p>	
<b>Diaphragm/ cap with spermicide</b>	The diaphragm or cap is a circular dome made of rubber, which is fitted by the	The diaphragm does not affect your menstrual cycle.	The diaphragm must stay in place for six hours after sex - more spermicide	Approximately 92-96% effective, if used correctly. If not used correctly, the

<p>woman over her cervix (neck of the womb) before sex. It acts as a barrier to stop sperm getting through to the uterus. It should be used with a spermicide. Spermicides are sperm-killing chemicals available as foam, jelly, foaming tablets, vaginal suppositories, or cream. A doctor or nurse will fit a diaphragm initially to check which size you need and teach you how to use it.</p>	<p>You need only use it when you are sexually active. It may protect against cancer of the cervix. Protects against some types of STIs.</p>	<p>must be inserted again if you have sex within six hours. Spermicides may cause irritation or an allergic reaction. Cystitis (inflammation of the bladder) may be a problem for some users.</p>	<p>chance of pregnancy can be much higher.</p>
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## Method of Contraception

### What is it?

#### Vaginal Ring

A recent arrival in Ireland, this is a flexible and transparent contraceptive vaginal ring, which releases low doses of oestrogen and progesterone, which are directly absorbed directly through the lining of the vagina into the blood stream.

### Advantages

The ring is inserted into the vagina by the woman herself and remains in place for three weeks, after which it should be removed. After a one-week ring free period, a new ring is inserted.

### Disadvantages

The ring does not offer protection against sexually transmitted infections.

### Effectiveness

<p><b>Progestogen-only Pill</b></p>	<p>The POP or mini pill contains only one hormone, progesterone. This encourages the cervical mucus to form a thick barrier to stop sperm entering the womb and makes the lining of the womb thinner to prevent it accepting a fertilised egg.</p>	<p>Useful for women who are breast feeding, older women, smokers and women who cannot use the combined pill. It can help to relieve PMS and painful periods.</p>	<p>It has to be taken at the same time or within three hours every day. It is not reliable if taken more than three hours late or following vomiting and diarrhoea. It can cause irregular bleeding or periods may cease completely. There is no protection against STIs.</p>	<p>Approximately 98% effective, if taken correctly.</p>
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# Safer Sex

Sex is risky, but then so is life. People have already learned ways to reduce the risks, like wearing seat belts when they ride in a car. In the same way that you make decisions about your personal safety and wellbeing, you should make similar decisions about your sexual health.

## What Is Safer Sex?

Safer Sex is about conducting your sexual health and sex life in a way that will minimize the possibility of exposure to Sexually Transmitted Infections and especially HIV. Of course the safest way to ensure that you eliminate the risk of these diseases or infections is by practicing abstinence.

However, if you plan on having sex your practices should be planned so that they involve relatively low risk of exposure to life-threatening disease. The most effective

way of reducing your risk is by always using condoms - whether you are having full vaginal or anal intercourse or oral sex. Make sure that the condom is put on before there is any pre-ejaculatory fluid.

It is not enough to put on the condom just in time to prevent contact with semen. Kissing is safe if



neither person has cuts or sores. There may be some slight risk from saliva.

### **Who Should Practice Safe Sex and Why?**

Everyone. Always. Many college students think that the possibility of exposure to HIV and AIDS is too small to be concerned about. A recent study of blood tests conducted at American college health services indicated that about one in fifty college students might carry the HIV AIDS virus. There is no cure for HIV/AIDS, so everyone must take reasonable precautions to avoid exposure.

### **What Is Dangerous?**

The vast majority of students plan on having safe sex but don't follow through with their plan for several reasons. For instance, lack of communication, accidents such as the condom splitting or being drunk are the main reasons cited by Irish students for having unprotected sex. Being alert and aware of the challenges and risks associated with sex is the key to addressing such issues.

- Intercourse (vaginal or anal) without a condom is not safe.
- Oral sex, which involves ejaculation without a condom, is not safe.



- Any practice, which involves contact with cuts, sores or raw areas, is not safe. Remember, even small or microscopic cuts can be dangerous.
- Any practice, which involves contact between any body fluids of the partners, is not safe.
- Sex while high on alcohol or other drugs is not safe because it affects judgment and lowers inhibitions about engaging in dangerous practices.

We live in a world where condoms are available everywhere, where many STDs are curable, and where we know we have all the information we need to protect ourselves, now it's just a question of using that information.

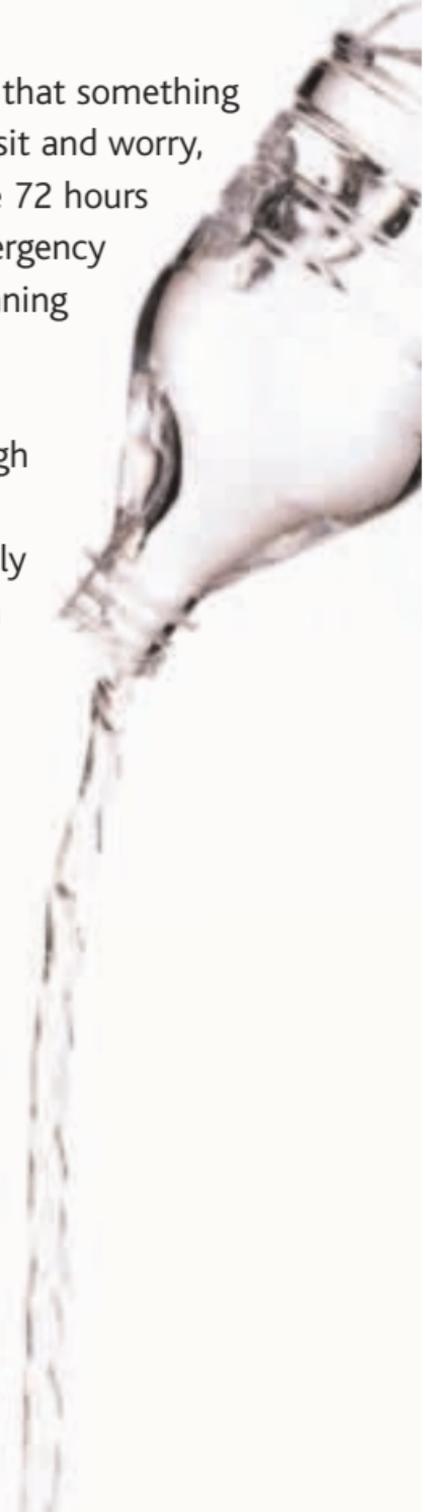


## Emergency Contraceptive

Having safer sex to protect against pregnancy and STIs must be your first line of defence, but we all know mistakes can happen. Condoms can come off or split, or you might just get carried away. In very rare situations you may be forced to have sex against

your will. The important point is that something can be done - you don't have to sit and worry, waiting for your period. You have 72 hours after unprotected sex to get 'emergency contraception' from a family planning clinic, gynecologist or hospital.

The treatment consists of two high dose contraceptive pills taken immediately and two more exactly 12 hours later. The treatment can be very nauseating and you may vomit. The doctor will prescribe anti nausea/vomiting pills as well to avoid this happening. If you vomit within 6 hours of taking the treatment it must be repeated. This treatment prevents contraception in 95% of cases if taken within the specific time frame.



# Women's Health Kit

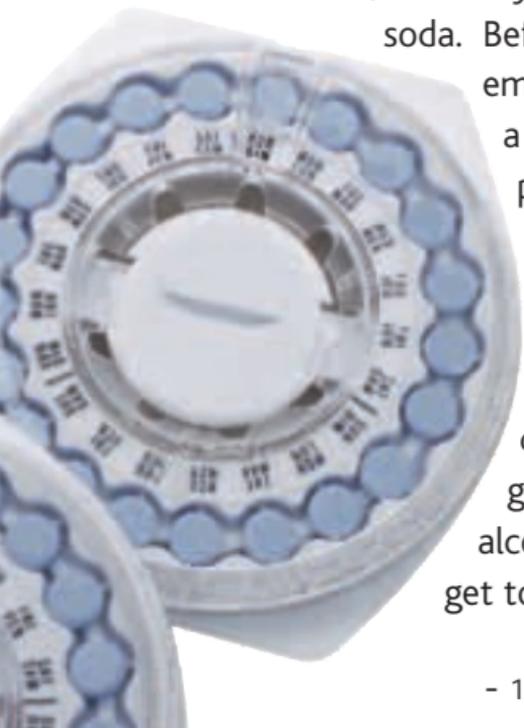
You don't need to let women's health problems like thrush or cystitis ruin your time abroad as the fortunate thing is that they are easily treated. Here are some points of information you should consider:

## Cystitis

Cystitis can be triggered by frequent sex. Dehydration can make you even more prone to the condition, so if in a hot climate you should drink plenty of water. If you have an attack of cystitis, drink a pint of water every 20 minutes for three hours. You could also try lemon water, cranberry juice or bicarbonate of

water, cranberry juice or bicarbonate of soda. Before and after sex, try to empty your bladder and have a quick wash. To be

prepared, cystitis treatments can be bought in chemists. They contain six sachets of powders to be mixed with water and drunk over two days. If you get cystitis, stop drinking alcohol, tea and coffee, and get to a doctor if it hasn't



cleared up after 48 hours as you may need antibiotics.

## Thrush

Thrush can quickly develop in hot humid climates, when the vagina's micro-flora gets out of balance. Wearing tights on a stuffy overnight flight provides the same over-heated environment, so leave the lycras behind, stock up with 100% cotton underwear and change it frequently. Thrush can be cleared up with anti-fungal treatments available in chemists. You can be prescribed an oral pill, vaginal pessaries or cream. If caught unprepared, a salt-water bath may help. Live plain yoghurt, applied on a tampon, will ease the itching and can sometimes treat the problem altogether.



# Health Insurance While Abroad

## Healthcare in other countries

As an Irish resident you are entitled to get healthcare through the public system in countries of the European Union (EU), European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland if you become ill or injured while on a temporary stay there. Until now, you needed an E form - such as the E111 or the E128 - to get such treatment. Now, these paper forms are being replaced by the European Health Insurance Card (also known as the EHIC or Blue Card). One Card is needed for each individual or member of the family. Your Card will be valid for up to 2 years. Apply for this card if you intend to undertake a course of study or coop in any of these countries but still consider yourself as ordinarily resident in Ireland. The card entitles you to the same service as a public patient in the respective European country in which you are staying.

To acquire the EHIC, start by applying to your local Community Care office or you can complete a form online if you have a drugs card.



It takes approximately 10 days to process your card. For those on work experience (Coop) or studying in a university abroad you should request a letter from your employer/university abroad as well as one from UL stating that you are departing on Coop/Erasmus/Socrates etc.

It is important to remember that before you are entitled to health care in your host country, you are required to register with that country's Health Board or its equivalent. Should you then require healthcare you should go to the nearest public system doctor, public hospital, or other public treatment centre and present your Card. The EHIC does not cover the cost of treatment in a private setting but only covers the emergency aspect of your cover.

European public healthcare systems vary from country to country. So for example, regardless of the emergency you will be obliged to pay 25% of costs in France whereas Switzerland require a payment of €90 per day (this information is accurate as of 2005) The EHIC does not cover the cost of repatriation. In addition, illness or an accident abroad may mean extra travel and accommodation costs. You may therefore wish to take out private insurance for your trip.



## Private Health Insurance

Private Health Insurance policies such as VHI or Bupa normally only provide accident and emergency cover for 180 days while you are abroad. Thus, if you are planning on being abroad for a longer period you should contact your health insurance provider to discuss alternative cover options.

In addition, you should be aware that you are still expected to apply for an EHIC card (and register abroad) if you have private health insurance.

Although the main private health insurance providers will offer you policy options for your period of stay abroad, you should note that the main providers do not cover any sexually transmitted infections you may contract while abroad.

## Abortion

Laws on terminating pregnancy vary greatly from country to country, and even from state to state in larger countries like the USA or Australia.

Where legal, there are time limits on abortion, e.g. in the first trimester. This usually means up to 14 weeks from the first day of your last period, or 12 weeks since the time of conception. It's important to seek medical advice as early as possible if you have missed a period.

## Back in UL

On arrival back home, if you miss a period and think you are pregnant, carry out a pregnancy test, make an appointment with your General Practitioner or ring a family planning clinic, such as the clinic in Limerick on 061-312026. It is essential to make sure you have not contracted a sexually transmitted infection. Most STIs can be cleared up quickly and easily with antibiotics. Some STIs can cause serious problems if left untreated, for example Chlamydia can lead to infertility and Syphilis can kill. The STI guide we provide in this booklet gives basic information - you may have some or all of the symptoms listed, but a doctor will need to do tests for an accurate diagnosis.

# Guide on Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Infection	Symptoms	Treatment	Complications
<b>Chlamydia</b> <b>Protozoal infection</b>	In women: slightly increased vaginal discharge; need to urinate more frequently; lower abdominal pain; pain during intercourse; failure to conceive. In men: discharge from penis; pain or burning when urinating.	Antibiotic tablets.	In women: infertility. If pregnant, ectopic pregnancy or premature labour. Infection can pass to baby, causing eye or lung infection. In men: inflammation of testicles, causing infertility. In both: Reiter's syndrome (inflamed eyes and joints; rash on feet and genitals).
<b>Nonspecific urethritis</b> <b>Infection, often chlamydia; may be</b>	Pain or burning when passing urine; white or cloudy discharge from tip of penis; frequent	Antibiotic tablets.	Rarely serious complications, but may cause inflammation of the testicles or Reiter's

<p>due to an allergy or excessive alcohol</p>	<p>urination.</p>		<p>syndrome (see Chlamydia).</p>
<p><b>Genital warts</b> <b>Human papilloma virus or HPV.</b></p>	<p>Contagious, small, pink-white fleshy bumps around genital area, singly or in groups; may itch but usually painless.</p>	<p>Podophyllin liquid painted onto warts or liquid nitrogen to freeze them. Warts disappear, but recur in half of sufferers.</p>	<p>Some types of HPV linked to increased risk of cervical cancer. May require more frequent cervical smears.</p>
<p><b>Pubic lice</b> <b>"Crabs"; parasitic insects transmitted sexually and by close contact or towels.</b></p>	<p>Itching; black powder in underwear from lice droppings; brown eggs or lice on pubic or other hair.</p>	<p>Insecticide shampoos and lotions. Wash clothing and bedding in hot water to avoid re-infection.</p>	<p>None.</p>
<p><b>Genital herpes</b> <b>Herpes simplex virus</b></p>	<p>Itching or tingling in genital or anal area; painful, small, fluid-filled blisters in genital area; flu like fever, backache, headache or swollen glands.</p>	<p>Antiviral medication can reduce symptoms and help prevent recurrence if taken in early stages of infection.</p>	<p>Small risk of miscarriage if in early pregnancy. If passed on to baby in labour, may cause brain damage or blindness. Caesarean delivery advised.</p>

# Guide on Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Infection	Symptoms	Treatment	Complications
<b>Trichomoniasis</b>	In women: fishy, watery vaginal discharge; itchy, swollen vulva. In men: stinging after urinating; urethral discharge.	Antibiotics.	None.
<b>Syphilis</b>	Open sore on penis, vagina, cervix, rectum or throat; skin rash, fever, headache, bone pain, fatigue, appetite loss.	Penicillin or other antibiotics effective at all stages. In late stages, organ damage may be irreversible.	If untreated, fatal heart disorders, brain damage, paralysis, damage to skin and bones. Can pass to foetus.
<b>Gonorrhoea</b>	In men: white discharge from penis; pain on urination; irritation; irritation of anus; inflamed testicles and prostate gland. In women: similar symptoms but less marked.	Antibiotics.	Gonococcal arthritis, with crippling pain and swelling, and fatal septicaemia. In women: may affect fertility. Can be passed on in childbirth and blind baby.



## Conclusion

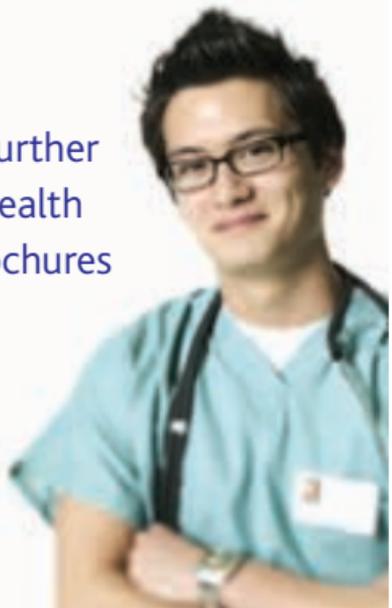
This booklet has been prepared for your use by the UL Sexual Health Working Group with financial support from the Health Service Executive Mid West.



We hope that the information in this guide has been of benefit to you on your experience abroad, whether on Coop, Erasmus/Socrates or taking a well deserved holiday after a hard set of exams.



If you would like further details on UL Sexual Health Working Group campaigns, brochures etc please contact the Student Affairs Officer at the university.



# Useful Websites

- World Health Organisation [www.who.int/en/](http://www.who.int/en/)
- Health Promotion Unit [www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie)
- HSE Mid West Region [www.mwhb.ie](http://www.mwhb.ie)
- Department of Health [www.doh.ie](http://www.doh.ie)
- Positive Options [www.positiveoptions.ie/](http://www.positiveoptions.ie/)
- Cura [www.cura.ie](http://www.cura.ie)
  - Irish Family Planning Association [www.ifpa.ie](http://www.ifpa.ie)
  - Hepatitis Information Network [www.hepnet.com](http://www.hepnet.com)
  - Info on Aids and HIV [www.aidsmap.com](http://www.aidsmap.com)
  - Centres for Disease Control and Prevention [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)
  - Health Protection Surveillance Centre [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie)
  - Travel Health Information Services [www.travelhealth.co.uk](http://www.travelhealth.co.uk)
  - VHI Healthcare [www.vhi.ie](http://www.vhi.ie)
  - Bupa Ireland [www.bupaireland.ie](http://www.bupaireland.ie)
  - Marie Stopes International [www.mariestopes.co.uk](http://www.mariestopes.co.uk)