

Sexual Health Check-ups

Since 2003 and following the stabilization of the cases on file in previous years, there has been an increase in Spain in the incidence of gonorrhoea, syphilis and Chlamydia. This increase has been registered not only in heterosexual and homosexual people, but is also affecting increasing numbers of people from different immigrant populations in this country.

Why Check-ups are important

If you are sexually active there is the possibility that you could contract a sexually transmitted disease.

Some of these infections can mean an increased risk of getting HIV if you practice anal, oral or vaginal sex without protection.

Sexually transmitted diseases do not always display symptoms, therefore it is necessary to have regular check ups and have certain tests to determine if you have any of these diseases.

Sexual check-ups give you the opportunity to test for Hepatitis A and B and to get vaccinated. Hepatitis C can also be transmitted more easily by sexual contact and by people infected with HIV. You can also get an HIV test.

In the centres for sexually transmitted diseases (ETS) you can also get free condoms and some centres give both condoms and lubricant.

Where to go

In Spain all tests and treatments that are offered by centres for sexually transmitted diseases are free. Local Health Clinics can also refer you to a centre for sexually transmitted diseases. Those hospitals that have doctors who treat HIV may also offer a test done at the hospital laboratory.

What to expect

Some ETS centres do not require an appointment be made, but there is usually a long wait. If you go to a centre that requires appointments you may have to wait days or even weeks to get an appointment. If you have symptoms, make sure you tell them at the time of making the appointment as they may have emergency appointments available that will allow you to be seen sooner.

When you go to a centre, you will be required to register.

Your information will be treated confidentially.

First, a doctor will examine you and ask what type of sexual relations you have had and if you are experiencing any symptoms. It is important to answer the questions honestly and completely, so that they can determine what types of tests are most appropriate. It is also important to inform them of any drugs that you are taking, such as anti-viral drugs or if you have any allergies to certain medications.

Then a nurse will see you to perform the tests that your doctor has ordered. Men can expect a sample to be taken from the penis and women can expect a sample to be taken from the vagina. It is important not to urinate two hours before going to the doctor. If you do so, it may hide an infection that you might have. If you practice anal or oral sex, a sample will be taken from the anus and from the mouth. Blood samples may also be taken to test for syphilis and (if you are a gay man or take drugs intravenously) Hepatitis A, B, and C.

If you have genital itching, a sample may be taken to test for herpes.

You will be asked for a urine sample.

Some test results will be given immediately, while for others you may have to call later to get the test results.

If you have an infection you will get treatment and you will be asked to return after the treatment has finished to check that it has worked.

If you have an infection you can visit a health counsellor, who can give you more information about safe sex and how to protect the sexual health of yourself and others. Although uncommon in Spain, some centres may ask you, when possible or practical, to contact your sexual partners so that they can be tested and possibly treated.

Finally, if you have genital warts, you will be asked to make regular visits with the nurse so that they can administer the treatment without an appointment.