

Choose to protect yourself – always use a condom

# Sexual health campaign evaluation

## Summary

During February and March 2023, the Public Health Agency (PHA) ran *Choose to protect yourself* a sexual health multi-channel advertising campaign. The campaign was a re-run of the sexual health campaign which was last broadcast in 2016 and evaluated positively. The campaign included a number of new elements developed to promote the Northern Ireland online testing service for sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

The campaign aim was to promote good sexual health and contribute to reducing STIs in Northern Ireland.

The campaign target audience was adults aged 16-34 years living in Northern Ireland. People in this age group account for approximately 80% of new STI diagnoses.

**Recognition:** More than eight out of 10 (84%) people in the target audience could recall having seen or heard at least one of the campaign elements.

**Positive actions:** One in two (50%) of those exposed to the campaign reported doing something as a direct result. Furthermore, almost two out of three (63%) of those considered 'at risk' of sexually transmitted infection (STI) due to multiple partners / unprotected sex were more likely to say they had done something as a result of the campaign.

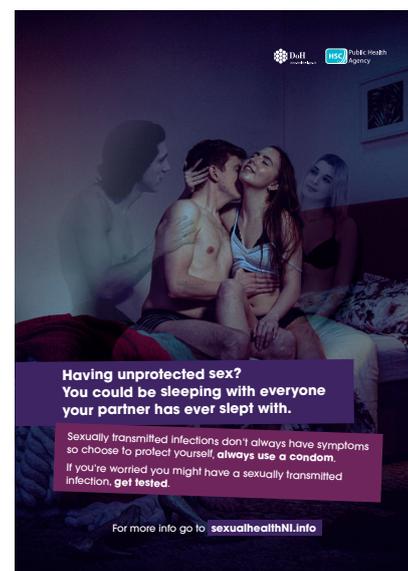
## Background

The *Choose to protect yourself* campaign aims to promote sexual health and wellbeing and contribute to the strategic objectives and priorities of the Department of Health's sexual health promotion strategy and action plan. The campaign focuses on one of the strategy's key objectives to reduce the incidence of STIs.

In Northern Ireland (NI), sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are diagnosed through Genitourinary Medicine (GUM) clinics or via the NI online STI testing service (currently SH:24). Established during the pandemic, the online service has increased access to STI testing. In 2021 combined online and GUM clinic testing was 41% higher than in 2020.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years there have been increases in the diagnosis of a number of STIs and while some of this can be attributed to increased testing, increases in overall positivity of samples within the online service and consistency with broader trends in STI transmission in Republic of Ireland, also indicate increased STI transmission. The highest diagnostic rates of the common STIs occur in people aged 16-34 years who account for 80% of new STIs.

The *Choose to protect yourself* campaign targeted people aged 16 to 34 years and focused on increasing awareness of the risks associated with unprotected sex, improving attitudes towards using condoms to protect against STIs and encouraging uptake of STI/HIV testing among those who engage in risky sexual behaviour.



1. Public Health Agency. STI surveillance in Northern Ireland 2022. An analysis of data for the calendar year 2021. Belfast: PHA, 2022. <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/2023-01/STI%20Report%202021%20tables%20and%20charts%20%282021%20data%29%20-%20Final.pdf>

## Campaign advertising

The mass media advertising ran from 1 February – 31 March across television, radio (including late night sponsorships), cinema, ambient, digital outdoor, video on demand and digital display, digital partnerships with Belfast Live and GAY NI, social media and Google search.

There were some restrictions on advertising timings due to the sexual content featured in the advertising; post 7.30pm on television and radio, post 8.00pm on digital outdoor. Despite these restrictions, the campaign was exposed over 26 million times.

The campaign was supported by public relations activity and stakeholder engagement.

## Evaluation method

To evaluate the campaign a survey was conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,056 adults aged 16-34 years drawn from the Northern Ireland population. Quotas were applied for age, gender, social class and local government district. The survey was conducted by a market research company via face to face interviews using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) with fieldwork taking place between 5 April and 11 May 2023.

Data analysis was undertaken using SPSS and included the construction of an 'At risk' variable to identify sexual behaviours associated with higher risk of acquiring an STI (eg multiple sexual partners, no condom use).

## Results

### Recognition of the campaign was very high

More than eight out of 10 respondents (84%) of all respondents were aware of at least one element of the campaign.

The TV/video advertisement was most commonly recognised (69%), with 64% reporting that they had heard at least one of the two radio advertisements. Over half (55%) of all respondents reported seeing the washroom poster/outdoor digital advertising.

### Awareness of campaign messages

When asked **unprompted** what were the main messages of the campaign, the most common responses were:

- have unprotected sex and you could be sleeping with everyone your partner's ever slept with (68%);
- choose to protect yourself – always use a condom (43%)
- risks of unprotected sex (40%)
- condoms protect against STIs (38%)

### Reactions to the campaign were positive

More than nine out of ten respondents said that the campaign was very or somewhat believable (92%) with a similar proportion finding it very or somewhat thought provoking (91%).

More than eight out of ten respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the campaign was clear and easy to understand (86%), credible and provided trustworthy information (82%) and stood out from other advertising campaigns (80%).

Six out of ten respondents found the campaign very or somewhat relevant (60%). Among those more likely to find the campaign relevant were respondents at risk of STIs (80%), those living in deprived areas (77%) and those aged 20-24 years (69%) or single (69%).

### The campaign increased knowledge

Almost two out of three (64%) respondents agreed (strongly agreed or agreed) the campaign told them something new.

Respondents aged 16-19 years (74%) and those living in the most deprived areas (76%) were more likely to agree that the campaign told them something new.

### The campaign encouraged positive action

Of the 84% who saw or heard at least one element of the campaign, half (50%) reported doing something as a result.



Those considered 'at risk' of sexually transmitted infection (STI) due to multiple partners/ unprotected sex were among those more likely to say they had done something as a result of the campaign (63%). They were also more likely to say they would buy/carry/use condoms more often (38% vs. all 20%).

### Online engagement

The campaign advertising signposted to [www.sexualhealthni.info](http://www.sexualhealthni.info) for further information and advice. Just over one third (35%) of survey respondents were aware of the Sexual health

NI website [www.sexualhealthni.info](http://www.sexualhealthni.info) Figure 1 shows the significant increase in traffic during the campaign period.

**Figure 1: Traffic to [www.sexualhealthni.info](http://www.sexualhealthni.info)**

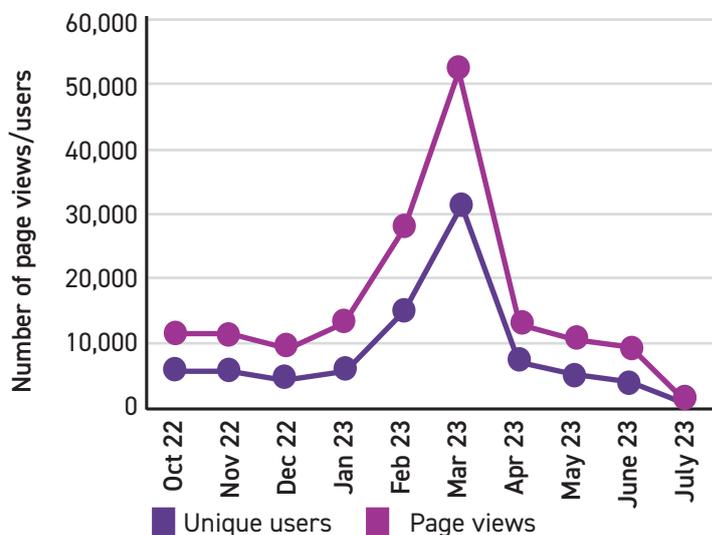
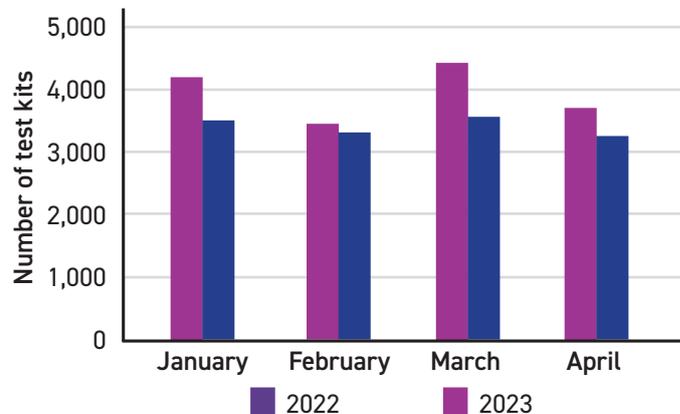


Figure 2 shows that orders of STI home testing kits increased when the campaign was live (February-March 2023) compared with orders received for the same period during the previous year.

**Figure 2: Online orders of STI testing kits**



Just under two thirds (63%) of all survey respondents said they would be very likely/likely to use the online home testing service if they thought they needed to be tested for an STI. Those 'at risk' were most likely to say they would use the service (78%).