



Developing and innovation of Ireland's free home STI testing service



sexualwellbeing.ie

SH:24

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HSE Sexual Health Programme

NUIG June 2025



Background

- National Sexual Health Strategy¹ aim: “equitable, accessible and high quality sexual health services, which are targeted and tailored to need, will be available to everyone.”
- STI notifications have been increasing in Ireland over the last 10 years².
- Survey of STIs and contraception services in Ireland (2018) showed inequity in access to public STI services³.
- Online services can overcome barriers to testing, such as embarrassment, difficulty travelling or obtaining an appointment.
- A pilot conducted in 2021, found that the home STI testing service was feasible, impactful, and acceptable to service users and providers (SHCPP 2022)⁴.



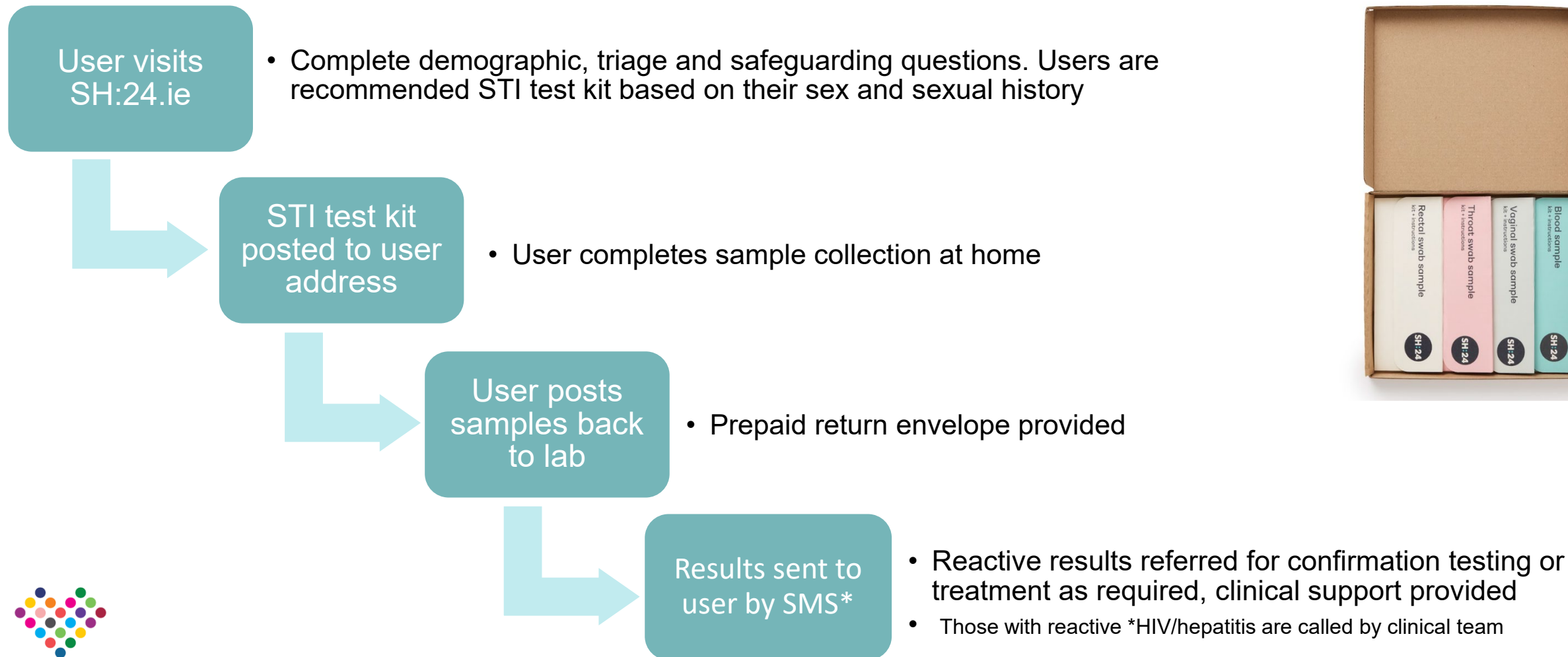
Establishing a national service

- Funding secured in budget 2022.
- Contract awarded to online provider SH:24 following an EU tender procurement process.
- The national service was launched in October 2022.
- Service is available to people aged 17 and older living in the Republic of Ireland.
- Service users are tested for chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, and HIV, with some users offered hepatitis B and C testing as required.
- Service is integrated with public STI clinics as a referral pathway for reactive results.





User journey





Service objectives and targets

Objectives

- Improve STI testing capacity and equitable access to testing across Ireland
- Shift individuals with less complex sexual health needs to an online platform
- Promote self-management through online access to sexual health information, services and support

Targets

- Provide 10,000 home STI test kits per month, of which:
 - >75% would be returned to the laboratory for processing
 - >95% of users would receive their results within 72hrs of samples reaching the laboratory





Home testing service data



Top line metrics

	2022	2023	2024
Test kits ordered	91,123	108,562	125,090
Test kits returned	56,714 (62.2%)	75,387 (69.4%)	91,421 (72.5%)
Reactive	5,934 (10.8%)	7,929 (10.5%)	8,906 (9.7%)
<72 hours result turn around time	97.6%	98.4%	97.2%
Asymptomatic	83.2%	72.6%	74.8%
Never tested before	45.4%	47%	40.5%





Reactive and positive results 2024

	2024	Overall reactive rate %
Chlamydia	5,564	9.7%
Gonorrhoea	1,788	
Bloods (HIV, syphilis, hep B, hep C)	1,554	

<25s chlamydia testing	
Negative	22,367
Positive	2,983
Total	23,845
< 25s CT+ as a proportion of all positive chlamydia	
	54%

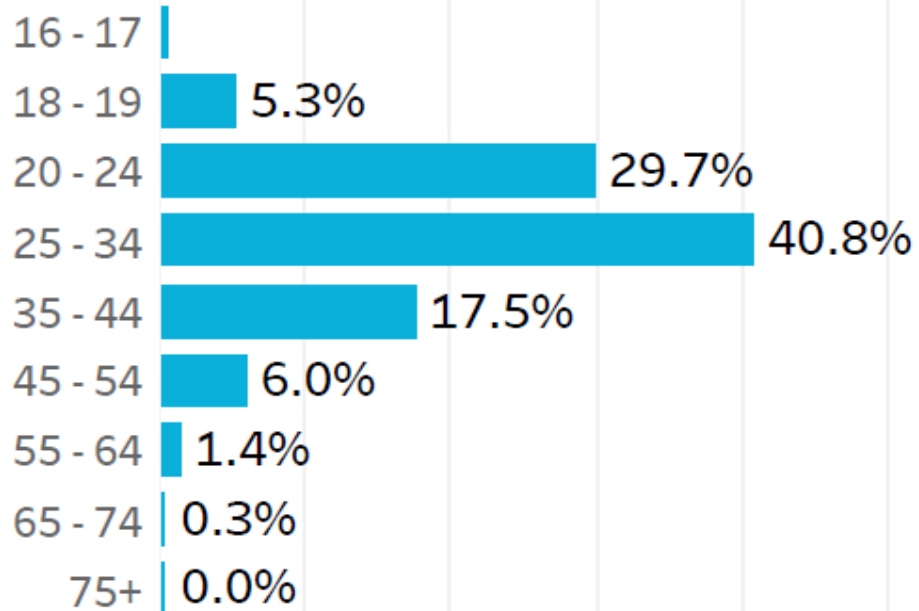
The home testing service accounted for **48% of chlamydia** notifications and **29% of gonorrhoea** notifications in Ireland in 2024.





Who is using the service?

Age



Ethnicity

- 75.7% Irish
- 10.3% Other white background
- 4.3% Latin American
- 3.3% African



Who is using the service?

Gender identity

- 57% female (incl. trans female)
- 41% male (incl. trans male)
- 1% prefer not to say
- 0.8% non-binary
- 0.2% other

gbMSM users

- 14.4% (14,640) gbMSM users
- 23.7% using PrEP
- 46.3% hep B vaccinated
- 33% had condomless sex in past 5 days
 - 73% not on PrEP



Safeguarding

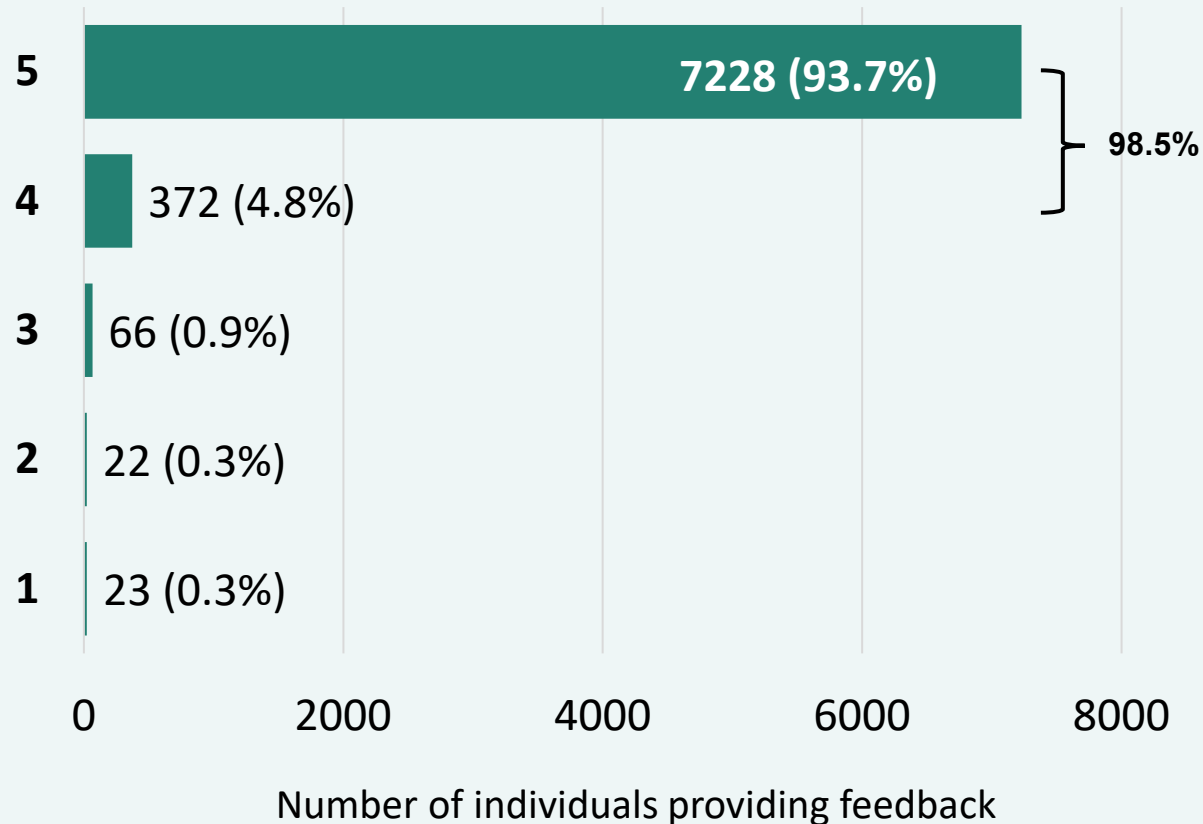
- 2,304 (2.3%) adults reported having experienced a sexual assault
 - Offered information, support and signposted to relevant services
- 721 orders from 17 year olds. 211 (29%) raised safeguarding flags:
 - Depression, pressured, bribed/paid for sex, partner age, drink/drugs
 - Follow up by SH:24 safeguarding team.





2024 service evaluations

Rating out of 5



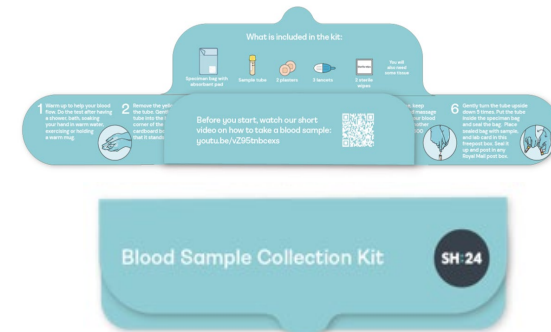
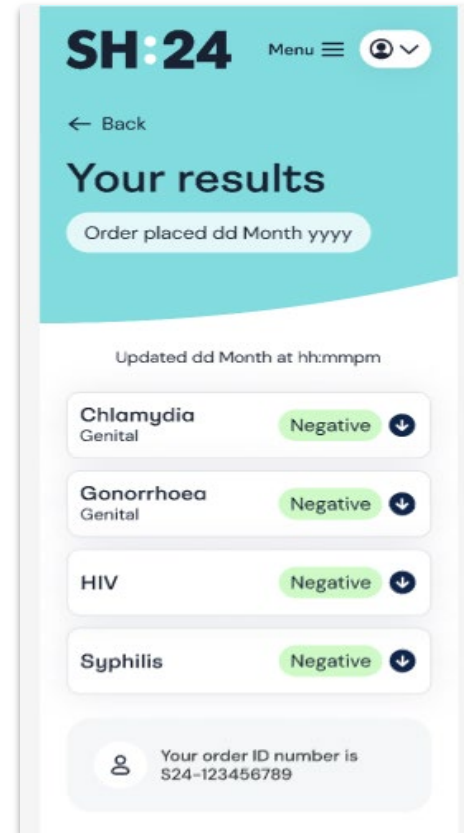
User feedback

- Easy, convenient, quick, inclusive
- Discreet, private, free, reliable
- Good communication, clear instructions
- Users have the most difficulty with blood collection and taking an adequate volume.



Service developments and initiatives

- **Interval STI testing for stable PrEP users** ✓
- **SH:24 user accounts** enables users to see their order history and results from orders placed through their account ✓
- **Kit redesign** – over 80% reduction in plastic kits and components to be more environmentally friendly and recyclable ✓
- **Online management of low complexity chlamydia** rolled out on a permanent basis, following a successful pilot in 2023 ✓
- **Offer of condoms and lubricant** to gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (gbMSM) within their test kit orders ✓
- **Piloting user activated kits** available at a range of community based settings where users do not wish to have kit sent to their address - underway





Online management of low complexity chlamydia

Individuals with a positive chlamydia result can opt to have their treatment prescriptions sent to their local community pharmacy, reducing the number of individuals who need to attend a face to face service

- Commenced on a permanent basis since July 2024

2024	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
# chlamydia diagnosis	435	486	491	551	451	335	2749
Online CT prescriptions	302	381	400	454	347	285	2169
Proportion who received online CT prescriptions	69%	78%	81%	82%	77%	85%	79%

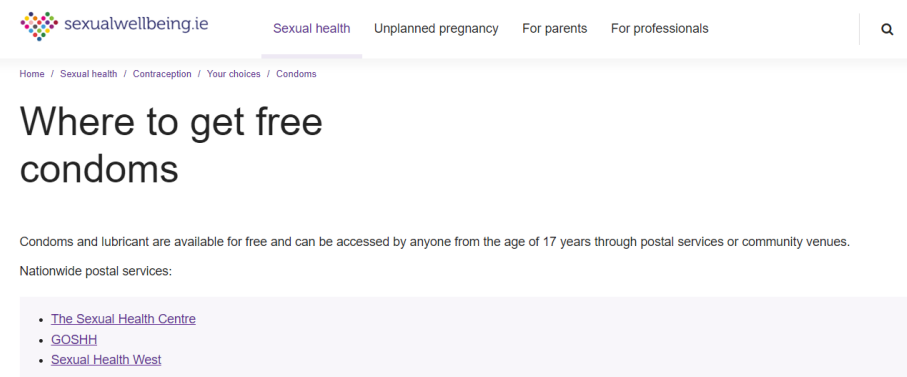




Opt-in condoms and lubricant in gbMSM test kits

From Oct 2024, gbMSM using the home STI testing service are offered the option of ordering condoms and lubricant with their test kits

- Other users are signposted to NGO postal services to access free condoms and lube on sexualwellbeing.ie/freecondoms



2024	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
# of gbMSM kits with condoms and lube	1,517	1,392	1,315	4,224
# of gbMSM kits	2,129	1,896	1,880	5,905
Proportion of gbMSM kits with lube	71%	73%	70%	72%





User activated kits

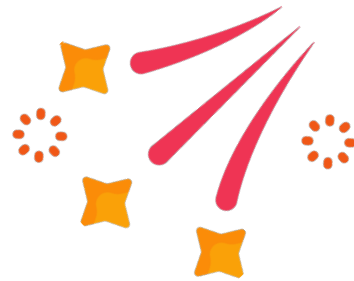


- In 2025, SHP and SH:24 began piloting user activated kits with 4 community partners
- Test kits are available from community partner venues/ outreach services and are activated at home via a QR code.
- Upon scanning the QR code the user is brought to the same SH:24 secure online platform to progress through the online demographic and risk assessment.
- A limited selection of STI test kits are available to community partners, appropriate for their key target population groups (gbMSM, trans people, sex workers etc).





Conclusions



- We are meeting the service objectives and targets
- The service has been successful in reducing barriers and improving access to STI testing and diagnosis in Ireland
- The service has been well received especially by young people, and provides users with timely access to STI testing and their results
- The service continues to develop and innovate, and we are looking forward to an exciting year 4!

Next steps

- Continue to improve access to PrEP – piloting a hybrid digital/f2f PrEP pathway - underway
- Improving OOH access to PEP, discussions ongoing with Emergency Medicine Programme





Acknowledgements

- HSE Sexual Health Programme
 - Caroline Hurley
 - Prof Fiona Lyons
- SH:24
 - Paula Baraitser
 - Justin Harbottle
- Enfer Medical
- Multisectoral Working Group
- Participating Public STI Clinics
- HPSC
- HSE Communications





Thank you

