



University of
Central Lancashire
UCLan

Women Who Buy Sex

Health & Safety Guide



Manchester
Metropolitan
University



The
British
Academy

LEVERHULME
TRUST

Foreword

This health and safety guide provides useful advice to women who purchase commercial sexual services involving physical contact. Developed for women by women, this guide has been co-designed with sex workers and women clients and is based on the findings of a national study into women's experiences of purchasing commercial sex.

Funded by a British Academy/Leverhulme Small Research Grant, the Women Who Buy Sex project found that while safety was not a key concern or anxiety for women clients, they did undertake strategies to enhance and ensure their safety when buying sex (see Kingston, Hammond & Redman, 2015, 2020, 2021). In this guide, we share these techniques alongside advice from sex workers. Without their input, this advice guide would not have been possible.

I hope you find this guide useful.

Professor Sarah Kingston

Citation

Kingston, S., Hammond, N., Redman, S., Stoops, S., Langley, S., (2022) *Women who buy sex: Health and Safety Guide*, The University of Central Lancashire.

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Introduction

For many women clients in our study, commercial sex was a pleasurable experience that led to feelings of empowerment, sexual gratification, satisfaction, and feelings of intimacy. Commercial sex offered women clients a service that was time-bound, focused on their sexual and/or emotional/social requirements, pleasure, and needs. Paying for sex for some women had a positive impact on their well-being and recovery from trauma in their personal relationships. For other women commercial sex provided them with the opportunity to experiment sexually alone or with their partners, and for others it provided a means of self-confidence building following a relationship breakdown or gap between dating. Women purchase sexual services from other women, men, and trans service providers, both alone and as part of a couple.

As with any sexual encounter, commercial or not, there are sexual safety strategies that can be employed to stay safe. While our study documented largely positive experiences of purchasing commercial sex by women clients, this may not be the experience of all women clients. This guide includes useful information and tips on the techniques you could employ when engaging in commercial sex.

This health and safety guide emerged from women's shared experiences of commercial sex in the Women Who Buy Sex Study (Kingston et al, 2015, 2020, 2021). The Women Who Buy Sex Study was conducted between 2014-2016 and sought to capture the experiences of women who pay for commercial sex that involved physical contact. Traditionally, women clients have been overlooked socially and politically, as it is often assumed that only men pay for commercial sex. While some attention has been given to women's involvement in sex tourism in academic literature and popular culture, this has been limited. This lack of recognition has meant that support and advice for women clients has been lacking. This health and safety guide has been developed to help women who wish to pay for commercial sex, stay safe, and practice safer sex. It draws on the invaluable advice from the women clients who took part in the study, as well as suggestions from clients, sex workers, and practitioners who work in sexual health and violence, who collaborated with us on developing this guide.



Staying safe purchasing commercial sex

- **14 tips on how to stay safe online**
- [In-person safety strategies](#)

Although violence or feeling at risk while paying for sex was not a dominant experience of the women clients in our study, women told us about the strategies they used to maintain their safety and well-being. Many of these are like 'normal precautions' that women undertake to stay safe when meeting people for non-sex work encounters, such as meeting for blind dates or encounters arranged through online dating platforms. Other women adopted techniques they had learnt as a sex worker and were keen for us to share those tips with you. The screening techniques sex workers use in their work can help reduce the risk of violence and abuse that has been documented in research (Stoops, 2016; Campbell & Stoops, 2010).

14 tips on how to stay safe online

Screening and Background Checking

Employing online background checks and screening practices to sift and identify legitimate sex workers for safe encounters is advised. Women clients commonly use online technologies to research potential agencies and to gain information about a sex worker, helping them to arrange a suitable and safe encounter that meets their needs, desires, and budget.

- 1 Reviewing the service providers' profile is a strategy adopted by some women clients. Some women considered the extent and nature of information provided in adverts. For example, does the service provider give enough detail to reassure you they know what they're doing, e.g., how to make a booking, what the process entails, what you can expect service wise. Some sex workers advised that well-maintained profiles, websites, and social media accounts are often a good indicator of legitimacy and investment in service provision. Checking when the service provider was last active can help determine if the person is still providing sexual services.





“

I booked a sensual tantric
massage... They have a really
good system where you can
meet your masseur for 15
minutes a couple of days prior
to your booking to discuss what
the massage will entail... which
I thought was a fab idea.... it's
reassuring. Client.

TOP TIP
check background online

- 2 When reviewing profiles, you may wish to consider whether the service provider offers the service/experience you are looking for. You may for example, be looking for something romantic or boy/girlfriend experiences - do they offer this style of service and have feedback recommending this? If you are looking to explore kink or BDSM is this something the service provider specialises in and has positive feedback on? Checking that the feedback from other clients is relevant and appears useful is a strategy some women clients adopt.
- 3 Finding a “well-established” sex worker was a key safety technique employed by women clients. Well-established sex workers were signified by the sex worker being associated with a reputable agency or having a professional website that is not brand new.
- 4 Once you have connected with the service provider and wish to progress to a booking, be mindful that they will need some details from you to confirm the booking but be wary of individuals requesting information that seems excessive.
- 5 Reviewing online reviews and feedback left by other clients about agencies, venues, and sex workers can be useful to avoid bogus service providers. Some service providers have their own websites which may demonstrate their commitment to service provision.
- 6 Service providers, like clients, will have their own safety and privacy screening methods, so they are likely to ask for some details about you. Some sex workers may ask for some form of identification. Some sex workers advised never to send photographs. If you are not comfortable with a service provider's screening methods discuss this with the service provider. Women clients advised that if personal details are requested too soon, or they seem too keen to get these details, that they trust their instincts and do not proceed.

“Do your research, go for a reputable agency then take the plunge Check their references and reviews, why you should use them; the agency I used, for example, had a lot of testimonials. Plus, I’d read about this agency in a magazine. Lastly it is a peace of mind that you can meet them before. So, to sum it up; research, check and cross check references of the services offered” Client.

7 Speaking to the service provider over the phone, email, text, or in person is advised. This will give you the opportunity to ask questions and determine the service sought and provided.

8 Communicate with potential sex workers beforehand via email, telephone, over video calling or webcamming, or by meeting with them face-to-face in a public venue. If you would like an introductory meeting with them before deciding to book a full appointment, the provider may charge for this time.

9 Establish clear boundaries in terms of what service(s) you require and determine what services are provided to avoid disappointment. This could be in your early contacts with the service provider, stating what services you require so it is clear from the start what your expectations are, and what your service provider is agreeing to. If you are booking a BDSM or fetish session, this is the time to establish any safe words, limits, and needs.

10 If booking with a partner, make sure the service provider understands that you seek services as a couple. Make sure the service provider is happy to provide the services you are both looking for and that you feel comfortable with everything discussed beforehand.

11 If booking to try something new, or something you may have reservations about, let the sex worker know so they can best support you to safely experiment or explore.

12 Agree on a meeting location that you are both happy with. A public place, where there are other people, is a good place to meet someone for the first time before going to a private space.

13 Agree on meeting etiquette. For example, how you will identify each other, what names you will call each other, when money will be exchanged.

"The first-time round make sure they have their own professional website that's been established for more than 6 months or hire somebody from an agency"
Client.

14 If after meeting or communicating with a sex worker, you feel uncomfortable with the initial interaction do not follow through with the appointment. "Trusting your gut feeling" can be an important part of making decisions about which paid sexual encounters to engage in and which to avoid.



“

“If I’m going to a hotel, I never ever worry, I just think that the staff or someone would hear something. I always feel safer going to a hotel. The benefit of a hotel is that in a good hotel, security is just a phone call away, for both of us.” Provider.



In-person safety strategies

Public Places

Employing online background checks and screening practices to sift and identify legitimate sex workers for safe encounters is advised. Women clients commonly use online technologies to research potential agencies and to gain information about a sex worker, helping them to arrange a suitable and safe encounter that meets their needs, desires, and budget.

- ✓ Determine which public venue you are happy to meet the service provider at before the booking. It is important that both you and the service provider are happy with the meeting location, so some compromise may be needed. However, this must not undermine your sense of safety.
 - ✓ If the public place is unfamiliar do some research on the venue and location; look up the venue online; use google maps to scope out the location and surrounding area.
 - ✓ Pick a room that you are comfortable with – you may wish to book a room with disabled access and/or has a safety cord that you can use in case of emergency. Ground floor rooms may also be beneficial so that you are close to the hotel reception and refreshment areas if you need help.
 - ✓ Many clients used the 'buddy system' as a safety precaution. This involves telling someone of your whereabouts and contacting them at agreed times. You agree a 'checking-in time' with someone you trust. This works best when you call or text your trusted buddy when you arrive at your booking and at the end of the booking. Some clients also checked-in halfway through the booking. It's okay to do this in front of your service provider, as this lets them know that someone else knows where you are. You can say something like 'excuse me for a moment, I am checking in with my friend, they know where I am'. Many sex workers used the same system, and this lets you and them know you both have security in mind.
- If you are uncomfortable disclosing to someone that you are engaging in commercial sex, you could tell them you are on a date.

TOP TIP
Meet in public

"If they [client] were to hire out a disabled room; if they were to hire out a hotel room that is a disabled room, those rooms have an emergency cord on it. So, if there are any upsets or dangers, then she could pull that cord, and somebody would come running... the disabled rooms are absolutely amazing because you've got an emergency cord in the bathroom and an emergency cord in the main bedroom." Provider

Sharing Information with Trusted Others

Sharing details of your location and plans with someone you can trust can also be a useful way to protect your safety. Clients shared information about their planned encounters with trusted friends and family as a safety precaution. Passing on details about where they were going, who they were meeting and how they had found that person offered women clients the peace of mind that if anything untoward did occur, there would be enough information to follow up on their whereabouts.



Checking in can provide you with the opportunity to make excuses and leave the public place if you are not happy to proceed with the booking.



A good idea is to agree a code word with your trusted person so you can keep any call brief if things go wrong, or you feel unsafe.



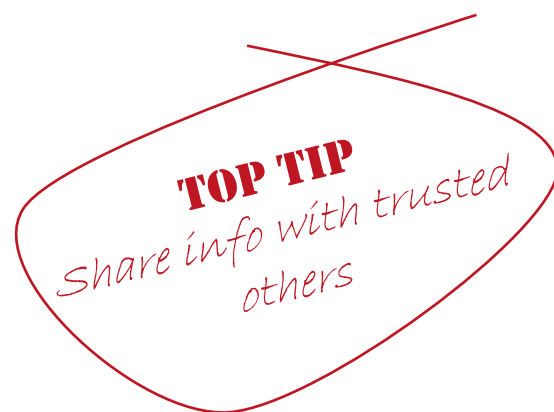
You could have this code word ready to send in your text/message outbox so you can send it quickly if you are unable to speak/call.



Update the friend throughout the booking process and when you are leaving. Some clients also made sure they were contactable by keeping their mobile phone always switched on.

"I'd let someone know where I was going to the hotel, and if they were from a website, I'd let them know what their name was from the website and perhaps which website it was so they could be traced." Client







"I also let them [sex workers] know that there's people that know exactly where I'm at and what I'm doing." Client



In-room Safety

There are several safety strategies that can be employed during the sexual service booking. These can include preparing and/or visiting the room prior to the booking, setting an alarm to slow, stop or exit a booking, and placing a personal safety alarm in a reachable location. Making the room a comfortable and safe space for you and the service provider is recommended.



-  You may wish to visit or prepare the room before the booking to check that you are happy with the room and what exit points are available if needed.
-  Setting an alarm on your phone that sounds like a call part way through the meeting can be useful as an excuse to stop, slow or to exit the booking if you feel uncomfortable.
-  You could ask the hotel reception to call and/or visit the room at a set time with refreshments. This can give you the opportunity to stop or slow the booking down or call for help if necessary. As a courtesy let your service provider know that you will both be disturbed during the booking. A sudden knock at the door could unsettle your service provider if you have not told them, you have arranged this.
-  You may choose to have a personal safety alarm in an easily accessible location should you feel in any danger. Pull the cord or sound the alarm and throw the alarm as a moment of distraction for you to get away. Do not rely on the alarm to alert others and then wait for them to come, use the alarm to distract the potential attacker and make an escape.
-  Remaining sober or limiting alcohol and drug consumption to maintain bodily control and autonomy was a strategy employed by some women clients to ensure their safety during sex work engagements.
-  Trusting your gut instinct and following your intuition was a strategy both sex workers and clients recommended. Both suggested that if they ever felt uncomfortable or something did not seem quite right, that they would not go ahead with a booking, or would seek to exit the booking as soon as possible. There may be certain non-verbal cues that you are unsure about, or body language that makes you feel uncomfortable. Sex worker and client advice was to trust these feelings and take them seriously.

A woman with long pink hair tied in a bun, wearing glasses and a white sweater, is looking at a smartphone. She is standing in a room with yellow-tiled walls. A black electrical outlet and a black device with a red light are visible on the wall behind her.

“

I told my friends where I was going and what I was doing ... I gave them the guy's number and address and said if they don't hear from me to ring me ... I kept my phone on the whole time. Client.

Sexual health safety strategies

- **Sexually transmitted infections**
- [What are STI's?](#)
- [Contraception](#)
- [Kissing & bodily contact](#)
- [Sex toys](#)
- [Oral & penetrative sex](#)

Sexual health is an important part of physical and mental health, as well as emotional and social well-being. We all have a responsibility to take care of our sexual health and the sexual health of our partners, whether we are engaging in paid-for, or non-commercial sexual activity. There are several sexual health risks when having sex, these include sexually transmitted infections including HIV, and unintentional pregnancy. Fortunately, we can do some things to mitigate the risks. The following sections talk you through some of those risks, offers practical strategies for reducing those risks, and provides details about what to do if something goes wrong.



Sexually transmitted infections

- Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) are passed from person to person through unprotected sex, oral sex, genital contact, and kissing.
- STIs can affect everyone regardless of your gender, sexual orientation, or age.
- STIs can be transmitted even if you only have sexual contact once with someone who has an infection.
- STIs can be invisible, and you may not experience any symptoms. Even if you think you do not have an STI and are therefore not a risk to others, you could have an STI and not be aware.
- It is good practice to have STI screening test before your commercial sex appointment, so that you are not putting others at risk.

TOP TIP

Avoid kissing or use a barrier

- Common STI symptoms include unusual discharge from the vagina, penis, or anus; pain when weeing; lumps or skin growths around the genitals or anus; a rash; unusual vaginal bleeding; itchy genitals or anus; blisters and sores around the genitals or anus.
- While there are risks, there are ways to minimize the risk of STI transmission. These include barrier methods such as using condoms and dental dams during oral and penetrative sex. Brushing teeth or douching will NOT prevent the risk of STIs.
- If direct contact happens (e.g., a condom splits or is damaged), please seek advice and medical support as soon as possible (see page 16 of this guide). The quicker you seek medical support/treatment the more you limit any long-term damage and the spread of infections.

What are STI's?

Sexually transmitted infections are those passed from one person to another person through sexual contact. An infection is when a bacteria, virus, or parasite enters and grows in or on your body. Common STIs include:

- **Chlamydia** – a bacterial infection usually spread through sexual contact with infected genital fluids (semen or vaginal fluid). Most people with chlamydia do not notice any symptoms and do not know they have it. For those who develop symptoms they can include pain when urinating; unusual discharge from the genitals or anus; tummy pain in women, bleeding after sex and bleeding between periods; in men, pain and swelling in the testicles. Chlamydia can usually be treated easily with antibiotics.
- **Genital Herpes** – a virus (herpes simplex virus HSV) that can cause small blisters that burst and leave red, open sores around your genitals, anus, thighs, or bottom; tingling, itching, or burning around genitals; pain when urinating; unusual discharge. There is no cure for genital herpes, but symptoms clear up by themselves. However, the blisters can come back (an outbreak or recurrence). With herpes someone can have no blisters but can still have the virus.

- **Genital Warts** – a virus (human papillomavirus), that can cause lumps or growths around genitals or anus; itching or bleeding from your genitals or anus; a change in the flow of urine that does not go away (e.g., it begins to flow sideways). Transmission of the virus can occur without physical symptoms (Mertz, 2008). Treatment of genital warts include cream or liquid applied to the warts; surgery to remove, burn, laser or cut the warts; freezing of the warts. It may take weeks or months for treatment to work, and the warts may come back. In some people, the treatment does not work. There is no cure for genital warts, but it's possible for your body to fight the virus over time.
- **Gonorrhoea** – a bacterial infection spread through bodily fluids. Symptoms include a thick yellow or green discharge from genitals, pain when urinating, and in women bleeding between periods. Not all those infected have any symptoms. Gonorrhoea is usually treated with antibiotics.
- **HIV** - a virus (human immunodeficiency virus) that damages the cells in your immune system and weakens your ability to fight everyday infections and disease. If HIV is not treated, it can lead to AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). There is currently no cure for HIV, but there are very effective drug treatments (Antiretroviral medicines) that stop the virus replicating in the body, allowing the immune system to repair itself and preventing further damage. This medication enables most people with the virus to live a long and healthy life. Medication can also be taken before and after sex to reduce the chances of HIV transmission, known as PrEP (pre-exposure Prophylaxis).
- **Pubic Lice** – tiny insects (sometimes called crabs) that live on coarse human hair such as pubic hair. Symptoms include itching in affected areas, especially at night; black powder in underwear; blue spots or small spots of blood on your skin, such as your thighs or stomach; inflammation and irritation caused by scratching. Pubic lice can be treated at home with insecticide cream, lotion, or shampoo.

TOP TIP
*Wash hands and sex toys
in between sharing or
touching*

- **Scabies** – tiny insects (mites) that burrow into your skin. Symptoms include a raised rash or spots on your skin, and intense itching, especially at night. Scabies can be treated through a cream or lotion and can be obtained from a pharmacy. Alongside using the cream or lotion all bedding and clothing must be washed at 50C or higher on the first day of treatment. Clothing that cannot be washed should be put in a sealed bag for 3 days until the mites die.
- **Syphilis** – is a bacterial infection that can cause small sores or ulcers around the genitals or anus (and sometimes mouth); a blotchy red rash on the palms of hands or soles of feet; small skin growths on the genitals or anus; white patches in the mouth; tiredness, headaches, joint pains, a high temperature (fever) and swollen glands on the neck, groin or armpits. Symptoms are not always obvious and some people with the infection are asymptomatic (Chow et al, 2017). If left untreated for years, syphilis can spread to the brain or other parts of the body and cause serious long-term problems. Syphilis can be treated through antibiotics.
- **Trichomoniasis** – a tiny parasite called Trichomonas Vaginalis (TV). Not everyone develops symptoms, but those who do can experience unusual discharge from genitals; soreness, swelling and itching of genitals, unpleasant smelling discharge; pain or discomfort when urinating or having sex; needing to urinate more often than usual. Trichomoniasis can be treated with antibiotics.

You may be offered unprotected sex or 'bareback' for an additional cost. You may be shown a previous sexual health test result to encourage you to pay for bareback sex. Remember that many STIs have no symptoms and a 'visual' check will not help you to identify an infection in the sex worker you visit. Additionally, some STIs do not show up straight away, for example HIV can take 3 months from infection to show up on a HIV test. As a rule, most sexual health tests are usually done 10-14 days after exposure. Finally, you do not know who your service provider may have had sex with between having their tests and seeing you.

TOP TIP

*wear latex or non-latex gloves
when touching genitals*

Contraception

Contraceptive methods protect against pregnancy, and some, but not all, can help reduce the risks of transmitting sexually transmitted infections (STI's). You can get contraception free from most GP surgeries, community contraceptive clinics, sexual health clinics and some genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics. Sex workers will often bring their own contraception, but we strongly advise that you take your own contraception to a sexual service booking.

- ✓ Prepare in advance, make sure you get contraception before the sexual service booking.
- ✓ There are lots of contraceptive methods to choose from. Choose a method that suits you and/or talk to your GP or GUM clinic about your contraceptive options in confidence to help work out what works best for you.
- ✓ Contraceptive options include the progesterone pill, condoms, contraceptive implant, contraceptive injection, contraceptive patch, diaphragms, female condoms, intrauterine device IUD (copper) and IUS (hormone), progesterone only pill (mini pill), vaginal ring.
- ✓ Only condoms protect against pregnancy and STIs during penetrative sex. Condoms are known as a barrier method of protection, as they prevent the exchange of bodily fluids during, for example penetrative sex. However, bodily fluids can be exchanged in other ways, as we will explain below.
- ✓ Always use condoms that have the CE mark or BSI kite mark on the packet. This means they have been tested to high safety standards.

- ✓ Emergency contraception can prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex or if the contraception you have used has failed – for example, a condom has split, or you have missed a pill. There are 2 types of emergency contraception: the emergency contraceptive pill (the "morning after" pill) and the intrauterine device (IUD).
- ✓ You can get emergency contraception for free at most pharmacies, most NHS walk-in centres and minor injuries units, some GP surgeries, contraception clinics, sexual health, or genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics, online, and some accident and emergency (A&E) departments (phone first to check).
- ✓ If you think you may be at risk of contracting HIV (by having condom less oral, vaginal, or anal sex), PrEP is a medicine used that can prevent HIV infection. Remember the person sharing needles or having sex with you may not know their HIV status'. PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) is highly effective for preventing HIV. You can get this medicine for free on the NHS in tablet form from sexual health clinics.

Kissing & bodily contact

Kissing

Kissing is an intimate act that you may seek from commercial sexual services. While mouth to mouth kissing may be less risky than other sexual activities, Glandular fever, oral herpes (mouth/nose cold sores), colds, flu and COVID-19 can be passed through kissing. Some sex workers do not provide kissing for this and other reasons. So, if this service is important to you, you need to establish this service is available in advance.

- You may decide to avoid kissing during a booking to protect yourself and the service provider.
- In the period of getting to know the service provider you may wish to look for sores or open wounds around the mouth. Please note, some people do not show visible symptoms of STIs, so visual checks should not be relied upon.

Bodily contact

For many women clients bodily contact and the associated feeling of intimacy is an important part of commercial sex services. If bodily contact is a service you seek, being aware of the potential risks involved can help you to improve your sexual safety. Alongside genital-to-genital contact, some infections can be transmitted by using other parts of the body e.g., hands, fingers to touch the genital area, and other skin to skin contact (such as vaginal rubbing). Using your hands to touch yourself and then the service provider can increase the risk of STI transmission between you and your partner.

- Wash your hands before and after sexual contact.
- Some clients enjoyed the exchange of bodily fluids with their hands but were aware of the increased risk of STIs. Some preferred to avoid touching their sex organs or mouth and then the service provider's without washing your hands in-between.
- You may wish to use gloves during your booking. Latex or latex free gloves are available and create a barrier similar to a condom (you may also want to use lubrication, but this does NOT provide any protection). Few women identified using latex gloves, but if you wish to use them it would be useful to discuss this with your service provider.

TOP TIP

Use a new condom or dental dam when using sex toys or engaging in oral, anal, or vaginal penetrative sex

Sex toys

You may wish to use your own or a sex worker's sex toys in your commercial sex meetings. If so, there are some useful things you can do to reduce the risk of STIs from sharing sex toys. Sex toys can contain bodily fluids that can transmit STIs. Sharing sex toys with another person can lead to the transmission of infections.



Wash sex toys before, at the end of a booking and between sharing. Ensure you use recommended products to wash toys as other things, such as washing up liquid, shower gels etc can cause disruptive PH levels and infections such as Bacterial Vaginosis and Thrush.



Use a new condom or dam on sex toys for each person.



Do not use the same sex toy used for anal penetration in the vagina or vice versa. This can transmit bacterial and fungal infections such as thrush. It also introduces faecal matter into the vagina which can cause infection.

Oral & penetrative sex

Oral Sex

Oral sex is a common service sought by women clients. If you choose to purchase oral sex services, you may wish to consider engaging in safe sex practices. STIs can be transmitted through oral sex and the exchange of bodily fluids.

- The use of a condom or dental dam to cover the genitals or anus during oral sex can reduce the risk of STIs. You may wish to use such methods with your service provider. A dental dam is a thin, flexible piece of latex that protects against direct mouth-to-genital or mouth-to-anus contact during oral sex.
- You can buy condoms and dental dams (sometimes called dams, latex dams, non-latex dams) in chemists and supermarkets but can also get them free from your local GUM clinic or sexual health centre. There are a wide variety of flavoured condoms and dams for oral sex. These often are not available from clinics (but some do stock them) so you may need to buy these.

Penetrative Sex

Penetrative sex is a popular service that women clients seek from their commercial sex bookings. There are however sexual health risks that come from unprotected sex. Having unprotected penetrative sex is the most likely way to pass on an STI in commercial and non-commercial settings. However, there are techniques that you can employ to reduce the risks of STIs.

- You may wish to use a female condom that are worn inside the vagina or anus to prevent semen or bodily fluids getting to the vagina or anal passage, or a condom that is placed over a penis or sex toy.
- While sex workers will often take the lead and will want to use their own condoms or put these on themselves for their own protection, do take your own condoms, do feel free to check the safety mark and date, and do check that the condom is on safely and securely.

- Make sure you use a fresh condom every time you have sex and never reuse condoms.
- Do not use more than one condom at once, the friction may cause them to break.
- Use water-based lube as anything oil based will cause condom failure, lipstick/lip balm/Vaseline can also cause this. Likewise, if you have an oil-based massage keep oils away from the condoms and dams as it will cause them to perish.
- Do not use oils on your genital area if you plan on having sex that will require a barrier such as a condom or a dam and make sure anyone who has touched any massage oils washes their hands before handling condoms / dams.

TOP TIP

Buy condoms that have the CE mark
or BSI kite mark on the packet and
are in date



Sexual health testing

Sexual health testing is a great way to check whether you have contracted an STI so that you can protect others and get appropriate treatments. Regular sexual health testing is recommended and there are various ways to gain access to sexual health testing (e.g., at a clinic, home testing, community testing).

You can see your GP, who may refer you to a sexual health clinic. You can visit a sexual health clinic without seeing your GP first and you can usually turn up without an appointment. Sexual health clinics are run in a variety of settings such as NHS and community charities. You will often get test results quicker than from your GP and you may not have to pay a prescription fee for treatment. Services from a sexual health clinic can be more anonymous than seeing your GP and you do not need to give your real name or tell staff who your GP is if you do not want to. You can find local clinics, services, pharmacies and postal services using the NHS website. Personal information will not be shared with your GP or anyone else outside the clinic unless you ask for it to be. You can ask to see a female or male doctor or nurse if you wish.

Home sexual health testing kits are available on the high street, online and on the NHS. Pharmacies generally charge for test-kits and in-house sexual health testing. Postal kits from the NHS and charities are often free - but are sometimes not available in all areas. Check local and national testing kit providers before ordering.

Before buying a self-test kit, it is best to talk to a health professional, such as your pharmacist. They can help you decide which kit is best for you, tell you how to use it and talk about the next steps should the test return a positive result. A positive test result can be a difficult outcome to deal with. You may wish to contact a healthcare professional to talk about the result and treatment.

You can also get free high-quality tests through the NHS via your GP, hospital, or sexual health clinic. There are several types of home STI testing kits available. Some involve receiving the kit by post, doing the test at home, and sending the samples to a lab. Others you can do at home using a disposable testing instrument, without the need to send samples to a lab.



If tests show you have an STI, you should tell your sexual partner and any ex-partners who may have been exposed so they can get tested and treated as well. If you do not want to do this, a sexual health clinic can usually do it for you without naming you.

No method of protection is 100% effective against all STIs and if you are having sex, or your partner is, you may want to consider regular testing for STIs.

When accidents happen

If you think that you could be at risk of contracting an STI or of an unintended pregnancy, there are a range of things you can do to manage the risks. Seeking help may feel intimidating, but your medical health is important, and no one will judge you.

If you think you may be at risk of HIV, you can get a medication called 'Post Exposure Prophylaxis' (or PEP for short) this reduces the risk of HIV transmission massively but **must be started within 72 hours of the risk or exposure. The sooner it is taken, the more the risk is reduced.**

PEP is available at your local hospital, GUM & Sexual Health clinics free of charge and there will be no judgements made about your need for this medication. Please see the NHS [link](#) to get further information about where you can get testing for STIs and information about the symptoms of STIs.

If you have had unprotected sex, or your usual method of contraception has failed, you might be worried about becoming pregnant. The most convenient form of emergency contraception is the morning after pill. It can be taken up to five days after unprotected sex, depending on which type of pill you take. The sooner you take the morning after pill, the greater the chances of avoiding pregnancy. The morning after pill can be [free](#) in some pharmacies or can be bought over the counter in most pharmacies, you can also purchase this online.

The most effective form of emergency contraception is the coil or (intrauterine device, IUD). It can be fitted up to 120 hours (five days), and in some cases later, after unprotected sex, either at your GP surgery or a sexual health/contraception clinic. If you would like to have the coil fitted, you should still take the morning after pill.

Sexual & physical safety





Being aware of what you and the service provider are consenting to, and having clear boundaries and expectations established at the outset are useful ways to protect the safety of you and others. Many women clients identified that they felt empowered being very clear about their boundaries and expectations before the booking, and sex workers too prefer to agree service requirements in advance of the booking to feel safer. Establishing the boundaries and service requirements in advance helps you and your service provider to make informed consent.

Not adhering to agreed boundaries, by for example deliberately removing a condom or dam during sex without a partner's consent, or not stopping a sex act when a safe word is used is considered a sexual assault. According to the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and the Crown Prosecution Service, a sexual assault is when a person is coerced or physically forced to engage against their will, or when a person touches another person sexually without their consent. Touching can be done with any part of the body or with an object. Sexual penetration is when a person penetrates the vagina or anus of another person with any part of their body or an object without that person's consent.

Many clients and service providers take precautions to reduce the risk of sexual and physical assaults, such as employing the screening methods described above, using safe words and being very clear about what their boundaries are, and what they will or will not consent to. Going against a person's wishes or overstepping agreed boundaries is not consensual. Should you become the victim of a sexual or physical assault, there are several agencies that are available to help and support you.



Sexual safety

-  If you are sexually assaulted, you can call the police for help on 999. They can help you access a SARC (Sexual Assault Referral Centre) for help and support.
-  If you do not want police help, you can self-refer to a SARC (Sexual Assault Referral Centre). The help you will receive will be the same just without a police presence.
-  For a full list of all SARC's nationally please visit the [NHS webpages](#) and enter your location to find your nearest centre.
-  You may wish to contact other support services such as [Victims Support](#), [Survivors UK](#), [Safe Line](#), and [Rape Crisis](#) for advice and support. These are specialist organisations who provide professional support to victims/survivors of sexual and physical abuse. Some of these organisations have free phone support available seven days a week and 24 hours a day. The service they provide is confidential. They will only share information about you without your consent if they're worried about your safety or someone else's safety, or if they are required to by law.



SARCS

SARC's are a 24-hour support service for victims of sexual assault. They provide a holistic service and are very supportive environments. They are free and all medication provided is free too. They are completely confidential and will not notify anyone of your visit without your consent. You will be fully supported by a Crisis Worker whose sole role is to ensure your choices are respected and to put you in control of the process. You can access a 'forensic medical examination' where swabs are taken which can be stored (if police are not involved) in case you decide to report to the police later. Most SARC's can also give you PEP medication, emergency contraception, and in some centres, vaccinations against Hepatitis B. All these services are free of charge. Some have clinics that you can return to for STI screening, or they will refer you or signpost you to your nearest one. STI screenings are not useful until 7-10 days after an assault as STIs will not show on early swabs. You can also be referred into services with an ISVA (Independent Sexual Violence Advisor) who is there to act as an impartial advocate, provide emotional and practical support, and if you choose to report to the police, they will work with you until after the court case. You may also access counselling via SARC.

Physical safety



In an emergency call 999 and report the attack to the police.



[National Ugly Mugs](#) – If you are a sex worker who has been attacked, you can contact NUM.

Email: casework@nationaluglymugs.org

Telephone: 0800 464 7669

You may wish to report a physical attack or robbery/theft to the police. If it is an emergency and you need medical assistance too, call 999 and ask for the police and an ambulance. The main priority is your safety and health so you may be taken to a local Accident and Emergency (A & E) department to be checked or treated. It's helpful if police attend at this stage as most first responders wear body worn cameras which is excellent in terms of gathering evidence. The police may also call CSI's (Crime Scene Investigators) to the scene so that any injuries you have can be photographed and/or measured and documented. This is often repeated a few days later as some injuries, like bruises, develop over time and may not be immediately visible to the naked eye. If you have injuries that are not medically urgent, call the police on the non-emergency number 101 to report.

Safer sex and COVID-19

Coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, is transmitted when you are in close contact with other people (hence social distancing). COVID-19 spreads through virus particles in saliva, mucus, or the breath of those who have it. It can also be spread through contact with hard surfaces that someone else who has the virus has touched or sneezed on, for example. COVID-19 can be caught from people who have the virus but do not have symptoms. Having sex with someone who does not have COVID-19 symptoms is not a guarantee that you will not contract it.

The Terrence Higgins Trust has issued [guidance](#) on how to have sex while reducing the risk of catching or spreading COVID-19.

More advice

If you would like any further advice about any issues identified in this guide, you may wish to contact:

- [Sexwise](#)
- [Terrance Higgins Trust](#)
- [College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists](#)
- [National Ugly Mugs \(NUM\)](#) Victim/survivor support to sex workers
- [NHS Sexual Health Advice](#)
- [Brook](#): Sexual health and well-being for under 25s
- [LGBT Foundation](#): Sexual health advice specifically for lesbian and bi women
- [Rape Crisis](#)
- [Victim Support](#)
- [Safe Line](#)



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