

This factsheet summarises the use of family planning clinics in Northern Ireland for the year ending 31 March 2004. Statistics for the use of family planning services provided by GPs are not collected centrally.

Key issue

All contraceptive advice provided by the NHS and all prescribed supplies are available free of charge, irrespective of age or marital status.

Family planning and the National Health Service (NHS)

Article 12 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 required the Ministry of Health, now the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), to arrange the provision of family planning services in Northern Ireland. From 1 April 1974, all contraceptive advice provided by the NHS and all prescribed supplies were made available free of charge, irrespective of age or marital status.

General practitioners joined the NHS family planning service from 1 July 1975, on reaching an agreement with the DHSS on an item-of-service payment each year, for every female patient consulting about contraception. The vast majority of the province's GPs provide a contraceptive service. The agreement specifically excluded the prescribing of condoms, and some GPs on moral grounds do not prescribe the IUD or emergency contraception.

The principal aims of a comprehensive family planning programme were to:

- avoid unwanted pregnancies;
- improve the physical health of families;
- reduce the perinatal mortality rate;
- alleviate maternal emotional stress.

In September 1975, a memorandum of guidance was issued to the Health and Social Services Boards (HSSBs) which stressed that a choice of

sources of family planning advice should be available in every locality, and people should be free to change their source and to attend clinics in another HSSB. An fpa/Contraceptive Alliance study carried out in 1995 showed that family planning is a highly cost effective public service. Every £1 spent on family planning generates about £11 in savings to public funding by preventing an estimated four million unplanned pregnancies each year.⁴ Further reductions in services, or in choice of service provider or method, which have the effect of reducing the accessibility or availability of contraceptive advice and services, may reduce this cost effectiveness.

Family planning services can be accessed from a range of providers that includes community family planning clinics, hospitals, general practitioners, pharmacists and other organisations such as Brook. However, this factsheet focuses on the provision of family planning services by GPs, community family planning clinics and Brook.

General practice

Almost all GPs provide contraceptive services (see Table 1). Some GPs may choose to provide contraception to people not registered with them for general medical purposes.

While the majority of GPs throughout Northern Ireland are registered on the contraceptive list to provide family planning services, there is no requirement for them or practice nurses to have received specialist training.

In research undertaken by the Contraceptive Education Service (CES) in England, 88% of GPs had some formal training. Of these, two thirds held family planning qualifications issued in the 1970s and 12% had current Faculty of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care qualifications. A growing number of practice nurses are increasing their role in GP family planning services. The CES research also revealed that practice nurses were more likely to have attended recent formal training.³ Similar data is not available for Northern Ireland.

Table 1: Doctors providing contraceptive services as at 1 January 2004

	Doctors providing contraceptive services	Doctors providing contraceptive services to anyone
EHSSB	438	365
NHSSB	259	216
SHSSB	202	169
WHSSB	199	170
Total	1,098	920

Source: Central Services Agency. These are the last figures available: figures are no longer kept.

fpa and other organisations (including the Royal College of Nursing, Faculty of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care, and National Association of Nurses for Contraception and Sexual Health) feel that GPs without an appropriate post-graduate qualification such as the Certificate of the Joint Committee of Contraception or the Diploma of the Faculty of Family Planning will be unable to provide high quality family planning services.

Community family planning clinics

Information on activity at community family planning clinics is collated centrally from the Korner return, KT31. Tables 2 to 8 present data on the provision of contraception in Northern Ireland's community family planning clinics only. Research has shown that clients often choose to access different providers depending on their age and the service they require.² Women aged 16 to 29 are most likely to go to a community clinic (56.7%) (see Table 4).

Table 3: Total number of first contact attendances at family planning clinics in Northern Ireland by HSSB area for the period 1996-2004

Year	EHSSB		NHSSB		SHSSB		WHSSB		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
1996	22,842	524	6,452	121	6,167	356	4,501	135	41,098
1997	24,439	576	5,375	150	5,580	262	5,340	119	41,841
1998	25,269	559	5,072	128	5,316	208	5,255	122	41,929
1999	24,944	579	4,825	123	5,144	321	5,651	78	41,665
2000	23,769	620	3,156	84	5,640	212	5,086	100	38,667
2001	22,714	619	2,283	79	4,676	135	4,679	120	35,305
2002	20,403	663	2,044	63	4,730	134	5,080	194	33,311
2003	23,318	667	1,750	64	4,206	99	4,866	246	35,216
2004	20,981	739	1,845	101	4,667	111	5,061	380	33,885

While many GP services are excellent, clinics generally provide a wider range of methods. Clinics also provide a service for women at different stages in their reproductive life cycle, which is often complementary to that provided in general practice. Many family planning clinics provide a number of services free of charge in addition to a wide range of contraceptive methods. Many of these are not available through GPs and include psycho-sexual counselling, on the spot pregnancy testing and well woman services including advice on menstrual problems and the menopause. Almost all family planning training of both doctors and nurses takes place in community family planning clinics.

Contraceptive provision

Tables 2 and 3 illustrate trends in the total number of attendances and total number of first contact attendances at community family planning clinics.

Table 2: Total number of attendances at family planning clinics in Northern Ireland for the period 1996-2004

Year	Total number of attendances
1996	87,875
1997	83,200
1998	80,086
1999	79,954
2000	72,126
2001	76,082
2002	75,302
2003	70,797
2004	61,292

Table 4: Summary of family planning services in Northern Ireland (year ending 31 March 2004)
Total number of contacts: 61,292

First contacts - female

Main method of contraception used	Number of first contacts in the financial year by age of client								Total
	Under 16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	
Oral contraceptive:									
1. Combined preparation	273	2,262	3,311	1,845	959	434	195	71	9,350
2. Progestogen	33	338	589	497	459	439	340	321	3,016
IUD (inserted)	3	45	180	247	311	261	202	174	1,423
IUS (inserted)	0	8	70	113	238	297	232	137	1,095
Cap, diaphragm	0	2	15	15	36	35	38	59	200
Injectable contraceptive	17	407	685	450	298	244	103	50	2,254
Other spermicides	0	2	5	7	7	7	10	18	56
Sheath/condom (male)	184	1,098	1,339	1,031	1,037	916	726	672	7,003
Condom (female)	10	64	43	52	62	45	40	37	353
Rhythm method	0	1	5	6	7	1	2	10	32
Female sterilisation	0	1	3	5	10	16	19	25	79
Male sterilisation	0	1	2	4	20	25	24	22	98
Implant	2	77	147	107	67	58	16	5	479
New method (1)	37	226	174	108	111	76	37	45	814
New method (2)	0	4	12	13	22	16	13	13	93
Other methods	26	150	242	193	205	166	131	206	1,319
No method used	123	594	927	743	628	513	449	913	4,890
TOTAL	708	5,280	7,749	5,436	4,477	3,549	2,577	2,778	32,554

First contacts - male

Main method of contraception used	Number of first contacts in the financial year
Vasectomy	17
Male sheath/condom	1,086
Other method	197
No method used	31
TOTAL	1,331

Sessions at young persons' clinics

Young persons' clinics	Total number	Males	Females
Clinic sessions	156	0	0
Total contacts in young persons' clinics	1,572	523	1,049
First contacts in young persons' clinics	852	302	550

Emergency contraception

Type	Number by age of client								Total
	<16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	
Hormonal (COP)	24	164	113	47	38	31	13	2	432
Hormonal (POP)	143	1,012	1,338	636	311	159	94	38	3,731
IUD (inserted)	5	30	56	47	33	30	23	11	235
Other methods	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	172	1,206	1,507	730	382	220	130	51	4,398

Table 5: Summary of family planning services in the Northern Health and Social Services Board (year ending 31 March 2004) Total number of contacts: 11,193

First contacts - female

Main method of contraception used	Number of first contacts in the financial year by age of client								Total
	Under 16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	
Oral contraceptive:									
1. Combined preparation	54	197	125	85	55	29	8	0	553
2. Progestogen	3	15	29	14	22	31	15	9	138
IUD (inserted)	1	2	10	17	24	20	19	6	99
IUS (inserted)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Cap, diaphragm	0	0	4	4	7	2	2	4	23
Injectable contraceptive	3	15	22	16	14	15	6	1	92
Other spermicides	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sheath/condom (male)	19	86	73	52	53	46	17	16	362
Condom (female)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Rhythm method	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Female sterilisation	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	3
Male sterilisation	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	3
Implant	0	8	12	5	7	5	2	1	40
New method (1)	24	94	61	23	13	13	5	3	236
New method (2)	0	0	5	5	10	10	8	4	42
Other methods	0	4	3	3	12	5	7	3	37
No method used	11	39	40	32	21	14	23	35	215
TOTAL	115	460	384	258	241	190	115	82	1,845

First contacts - male

Main method of contraception used	Number of first contacts in the financial year
Vasectomy	0
Male sheath/condom	94
Other method	2
No method used	5
TOTAL	101

Emergency contraception

Type	Number by age of client								Total
	<16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	
Hormonal (COP)	12	85	74	37	24	23	8	2	265
Hormonal (POP)	16	72	50	16	9	7	1	2	173
IUD (inserted)	0	1	2	2	1	1	3	1	11
Other methods	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	28	158	126	55	34	31	12	5	449

Table 6: Summary of family planning services in the Eastern Health and Social Services Board (year ending 31 March 2004) Total number of contacts: 29,329

First contacts - female

Main method of contraception used	Number of first contacts in the financial year by age of client								Total
	Under 16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	
Oral contraceptive:									
1. Combined preparation	170	1,601	2,793	1,489	733	301	139	44	7,270
2. Progestogen	18	189	438	373	327	299	241	235	2,120
IUD (inserted)	0	31	150	173	203	170	119	121	967
IUS (inserted)	0	2	33	49	107	175	145	82	593
Cap, diaphragm	0	2	11	9	21	26	24	31	124
Injectable contraceptive	5	300	518	344	218	181	61	22	1,649
Other spermicides	0	0	1	2	3	2	4	12	24
Sheath/condom (male)	88	640	966	672	599	488	401	373	4,227
Condom (female)	0	0	1	4	0	4	0	1	10
Rhythm method	0	0	2	1	5	1	1	2	12
Female sterilisation	0	0	3	2	6	12	15	16	54
Male sterilisation	0	1	2	3	19	25	19	21	90
Implant	1	50	104	85	45	37	13	3	338
New method (1)	0	0	2	1	4	1	3	2	13
New method (2)	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	4
Other methods	26	129	184	131	116	104	57	146	893
No method used	65	363	618	461	337	228	194	327	2,593
TOTAL	373	3,308	5,828	3,799	2,744	2,055	1,436	1,438	20,981

First contacts – male

Main method of contraception chosen	Number of first contacts in the financial year
Vasectomy	17
Male sheath/condom	514
Other method	195
No method used	13
TOTAL	739

Sessions at young persons' clinics

Young persons' clinics	Total number	Males	Females
Clinic sessions	37	0	0
Total contacts in young persons' clinics	327	271	56
First contacts in young persons' clinics	226	182	44

Emergency contraception

Type	Number by age of client								Total
	<16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	
Hormonal (COP)	3	7	8	1	3	1	1	0	24
Hormonal (POP)	96	796	1,182	563	273	127	80	29	3,146
IUD (inserted)	5	18	43	23	16	12	9	1	127
Other methods	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	104	821	1,233	587	292	140	90	30	3,297

Table 7: Summary of family planning services in the Southern Health and Social Services Board (year ending 31 March 2004) Total number of contacts: 8,561

First contacts - female

Main method of contraception used	Number of first contacts in the financial year by age of client								Total
	Under 16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	
Oral contraceptive:									
1. Combined preparation	32	257	217	134	63	37	20	7	767
2. Progestogen	1	32	39	41	44	38	30	24	249
IUD (inserted)	0	5	8	28	36	34	34	20	165
IUS (inserted)	0	2	23	29	76	62	43	20	255
Cap, diaphragm	0	0	0	1	1	4	9	11	26
Injectable contraceptive	8	53	82	48	25	27	18	7	268
Other spermicides	0	2	4	5	2	3	2	1	19
Sheath/condom (male)	30	150	188	193	213	219	162	135	1,290
Condom (female)	0	1	1	1	3	1	1	5	13
Rhythm method	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	5	7
Female sterilisation	0	0	0	2	4	4	2	9	21
Male sterilisation	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	5
Implant	1	19	31	17	15	16	1	1	101
New method (1)	0	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	5
New method (2)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other methods	0	17	53	54	75	52	57	52	360
No method used	27	88	152	123	123	131	129	343	1,116
TOTAL	99	627	799	679	681	629	512	641	4,667

First contacts – male

Main method of contraception used	Number of first contacts in the financial year
Vasectomy	0
Male sheath/condom	111
Other method	0
No method used	0
TOTAL	111

Sessions at young persons' clinics

Young persons' clinics	Total number	Males	Females
Clinic sessions	26	0	0
Total contacts in young persons' clinics	50	0	50
First contacts in young persons' clinics	40	0	40

Emergency contraception

Type	Number by age of client								Total
	<16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	
Hormonal (COP)	0	3	2	0	1	0	1	0	7
Hormonal (POP)	23	91	59	36	19	11	8	2	249
IUD (inserted)	0	5	2	4	1	0	0	0	12
Other methods	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	23	99	63	40	21	11	9	2	268

Table 8: Summary of family planning services in the Western Health and Social Services Board (year ending 31 March 2004) Total number of contacts: 12,209

First contacts - female

Main method of contraception used	Number of first contacts in the financial year by age of client								Total
	Under 16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	
Oral contraceptive:									
1. Combined preparation	17	207	176	137	108	67	28	20	760
2. Progestogen	11	102	83	69	66	71	54	53	509
IUD (inserted)	2	7	12	29	48	37	30	27	192
IUS (inserted)	0	4	14	35	54	60	44	35	246
Cap, diaphragm	0	0	0	1	7	3	3	13	27
Injectable contraceptive	1	39	63	42	41	21	18	20	245
Other spermicides	0	0	0	0	2	2	4	5	13
Sheath/condom (male)	47	222	112	114	172	163	146	148	1,124
Condom (female)	10	63	41	47	58	40	39	31	329
Rhythm method	0	1	3	4	1	0	1	3	13
Female sterilisation	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Male sterilisation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Implant	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New method (1)	13	131	110	82	94	61	29	40	560
New method (2)	0	4	5	8	11	5	5	9	47
Other methods	0	0	2	5	2	5	10	5	29
No method used	20	104	117	127	147	140	103	208	966
TOTAL	121	885	738	700	811	675	514	617	5,061

First contacts – male

Main method of contraception used	Number of first contacts in the financial year
Vasectomy	0
Male sheath/condom	367
Other method	0
No method used	13
TOTAL	380

Sessions at young persons' clinics

Young persons' clinics	Total number	Males	Females
Clinic sessions	93	0	0
Total contacts in young persons' clinics	1,195	252	943
First contacts in young persons' clinics	586	120	466

Emergency contraception

Type	Number by age of client								Total
	<16	16-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45+	
Hormonal (COP)	9	69	29	9	10	7	3	0	136
Hormonal (POP)	8	53	47	21	10	14	5	5	163
IUD (inserted)	0	6	9	18	15	17	11	9	85
Other methods	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	17	128	85	48	35	38	19	14	384

Brook

Brook is a voluntary organisation providing a part time seven day a week free confidential contraception and sexual health service for young women under 19 years and young men up to 25 years. Table 9 presents data on the provision of contraception by Brook.

Table 9: Summary of Brook (year ending 31 March 2004) Total client visits: 7,476

New client visits - female

Main method of contraception used	Number of first contacts in the financial year								Total
	Under 15	15	16	17	18	19	20-21	22-23	
Oral contraceptive:									
1. Combined preparation	52	110	210	176	113	39	0	0	700
2. Progestogen	4	5	10	13	7	3	0	0	42
IUD (inserted)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cap	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Injectable contraceptive	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Condoms	137	217	234	154	95	54	0	0	891
Femidom	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other methods	29	58	108	82	67	31	0	0	375
CFR (medical consultation other than contraception)	40	39	73	68	54	28	0	0	302
TOTAL	262	429	635	494	337	155	0	0	2,312

Contacts – male

Main method of contraception chosen	All client visits	New client visits
CFR	18	17
Male sheath/condom	738	670
TOTAL	756	687

Emergency contraception

Type	Number by age of client								Total
	Under 15	15	16	17	18	19	20-21	22-23	
Hormonal (COP)	90	255	492	490	356	187	0	1	1,871
IUD (inserted)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	90	255	492	490	356	187	0	1	1,871

Source: Brook

References

1. Family Planning Services. Memorandum of guidance. Issued with circular letter DHSS (OS1). Department of Health and Social Services, 1975.
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3. Walsh J. Reviewing contraceptive services: research findings and framework. London: Health Education Authority, 1999.
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