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MEDIA RELEASE For immediate distribution

Sexual and Reproductive Health during COVID 19 released

Gippsland Women's Health has developed a factsheet to ensure that women's sexual and reproductive health is not neglected during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. People can still contract sexually transmitted infections (STIs) during this time and it is predicted that there will be increasing rates of unplanned pregnancy and reproductive coercion (Marie Stopes, 2020).

Access to condoms in Gippsland will be reduced with some condom vending machines that are in public toilets now locked and some places where you can get free condoms closed. Condoms are still available at supermarkets, pharmacies, petrol stations, online and at some health and community organisations. For anyone that has sex without a condom and is worried that they may have an STI, they can get tested at their doctor or use TESTme (www.testme.org.au). This service is free for rural Victorians that are younger than 25 years, rural Victorian men who have sex with men and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

If a woman is taking the contraceptive pill it is important that she continues. GP clinics are offering telehealth or telephone consultations and can send a prescription to the woman's local pharmacy or directly to their home. Face to face consultations are also available where assessed as clinically appropriate. There are also online options such as *Kin* (kinfertility.com.au) which delivers a woman's pill to her door after online review by a doctor. Insertion of Long Acting Reversible Contraceptives such as Implanon and IUDs can still occur during the pandemic. There is advice that it is safe to leave these in for longer and the woman should discuss this with their doctor. (Family Planning Victoria, 2020).

The **Emergency Contraceptive Pill is still available** to women over the counter at pharmacies to prevent a pregnancy after unprotected sex.

Women can still access abortion services although their ability to afford these services may be reduced because of job losses due to the pandemic. Marie Stopes Australia has indicated that there have been national abortion access issues which have been increasing every day since the pandemic announcement on 11 March 2020. (Marie Stopes, 2020). This is concerning as access to abortions is time-critical and later gestation presentations reduce women's options.

Quote attributable to Melanie Brown, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Gippsland Women's Health:

"Reproductive health services are essential services and need to be maintained during the pandemic to ensure that women's reproductive rights are protected"

Women can speak to someone about their contraception, pregnancy or sexual health needs by contacting 1800 My Options (1800 555 660) or visit www.1800myoptions.org.au. This is a free, confidential sexual and reproductive health information helpline for Victorian women.



References

Family Planning Victoria (2020) Our Position Statement on LARC access during the COVID-19 pandemic. Retrieved online on 16/04/2020 at <https://www.fpv.org.au/blog/position-statement-larc-access-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>

Marie Stopes Australia (2020) Situational Report: Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights in Australia, Retrieved online on 20/04/2020 <https://resources.mariestopes.org.au/SRHRinAustralia.pdf>

Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health fact sheet COVID-19 (2020) Gippsland Women's Health, <https://www.gwhealth.asn.au/work/sexual-and-reproductive-health/>

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