



Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health during COVID-19

Sexual and Reproductive Health remains important during the 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).

There has been increased public access to condoms across Gippsland through partnerships with local councils, health services and community groups (Gippsland Women's Health, 2019). Unfortunately, this access will be reduced during the pandemic. Some condom vending machines that are in public toilets may now be locked and some places where free condoms were available may be closed. Condoms are still available from supermarkets, pharmacies, petrol stations and online.

STI testing may be reduced due to demands on the health care system although free online testing is still available at TESTme (www.testme.org.au). This service is for rural Victorians aged 25 years and younger, rural Victorian men who have sex with men and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Access to some reproductive health services such as abortion services is limited in Gippsland and many women are referred to Melbourne for these services (Gippsland Women's Health, 2018). Women's ability to afford these services may be reduced due to job losses due to the pandemic. Marie Stopes Australia has indicated that there have been national 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.

The Emergency contraceptive pill is still available to women over the counter at pharmacies to prevent a pregnancy post unprotected sex, however access may be restricted subject to pharmacist's discretion. (Gippsland Women's Health 2018). If a woman is taking the contraceptive pill it is important that she continues.

GP clinics are offering telehealth or telephone consultations (which are bulk billed in most cases but check with the provider prior to making the appointment) 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.

Online options such as *Kin* (kinfertility.com.au) will deliver a woman's pill to her door after review online by a doctor. Insertion of Long Acting Reversible Contraceptives such as Implanon and IUDs are still important 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).

1800 my options (www.1800myoptions.org.au or phone 1800 696 784) is a free, confidential sexual and reproductive health information helpline service for Victorian women. The service is currently modified with a call back system but remains the best central information point for women's sexual and reproductive health needs including the location of abortion services.



References

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Produced in collaboration with the Gippsland Sexual and Reproductive Health Alliance.