

# JSNA Health and Wellbeing Profile 2023/24

## Chlamydia (2022 data)

### Summary points

- Chlamydia is the most common STI in Bristol and England.
- Although uptake improved in 2022 compared to 2021, the number of chlamydia screening tests undertaken in young people is 41% lower than in 2019, pre-Covid.
- The percentage of tests that were positive in young people increased in 2022.
- 1 in 8 of the eligible population was screened in 2022 – this is significantly lower than England.
- There were 1,184 diagnoses of chlamydia among 15 – 24 year-olds in Bristol in 2022 – a 43% increase since 2021, but still below pre-Covid figures.
- There were 755 diagnoses of chlamydia in people over 25 in 2022.
- The chlamydia detection rate for young people is very low compared to England and other Core Cities, this suggests that we are not detecting chlamydia in enough people.
- Across all ages, females are more likely to be tested for chlamydia and the chlamydia detection rate is much higher for females than males.

### Chlamydia

Chlamydia is the most common Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) in England. It is usually spread through unprotected sex and is most common in young people aged 15-24. The infection has no symptoms for approximately 50% of men and 70-80% of women, and as a result, the majority of infections remain undiagnosed. Without treatment, chlamydia can spread to other parts of the body and lead to serious long-term health problems such as pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility. In 2021/22 there were 275 hospital admissions for pelvic inflammatory disease in Bristol. This rate of 235.7 per 100,000 women aged 15-44 is slightly higher than the England rate of 224.4.

In Bristol there were 3,948 new Sexually Transmitted Infections in 2022. Of these, 1,942 were chlamydia, and 1,184 of these were in 15-24 year olds (made up of 739 in females, and 317 in males).

### National Chlamydia Screening Programme

The National Chlamydia Screening Programme was implemented in 2008 to support opportunistic screening for asymptomatic young people aged 15-24 to increase detection, to enable treatment and interrupt spread and thus reduce chlamydia prevalence.

In line with changes nationally, the Chlamydia Screening Programme in Bristol changed in April 2022 to focus on reducing the harms from untreated chlamydia infection. These harms occur predominantly in young women and other people with a womb or ovaries - this includes transgender men, non-binary people assigned female at birth, and intersex people with a womb or ovaries. Therefore, opportunistic screening is now focused on these groups. Young men in Bristol are still able to access asymptomatic testing through [Unity Sexual Health's postal kit service](#).

The detection rate is considered a measure of control activity, not a measure of disease.

Given the change in programme aim, the benchmarking thresholds have been revised by the UK Health Security Agency and are now measured against females only. The new female-only benchmark detection rate is 3,250 per 100,000 female population aged 15-24. Neither England nor Bristol has been achieving this benchmark. In Bristol the rate fell between 2018 and 2021 but increased slightly in 2022 to 1,934 per 100,000.<sup>1</sup> This is lower than the England average of 2,110 per 100,000 (see fig 1).

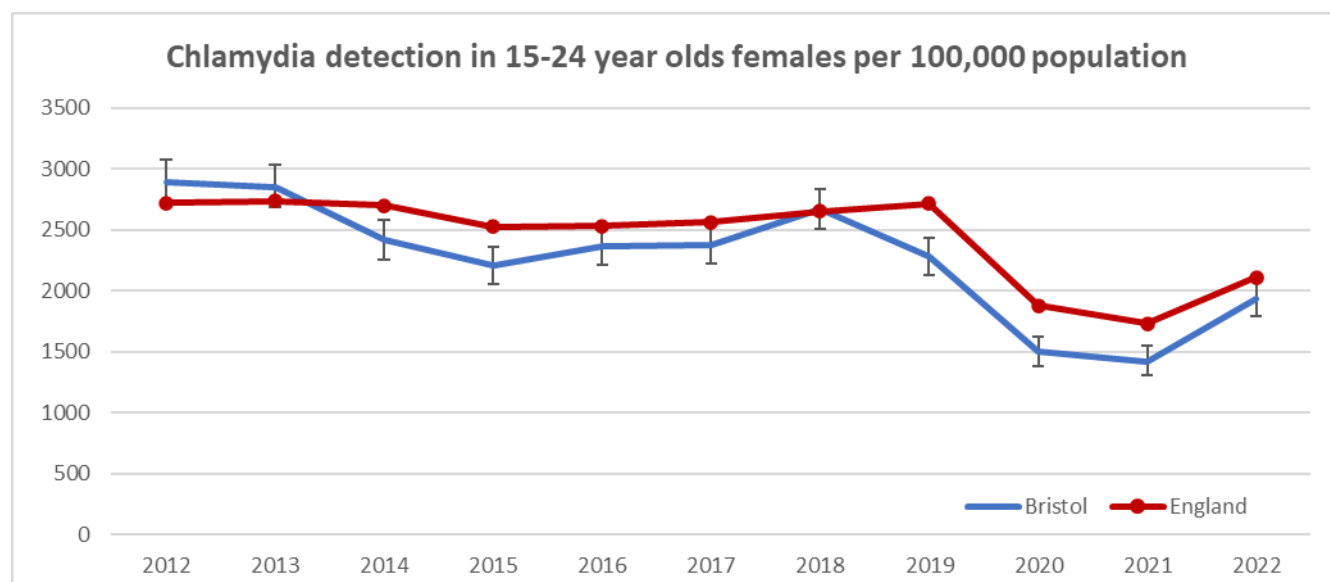


Fig 1: Chlamydia detection rate in females, Bristol v England, via OHID Sexual and Reproductive Health Profiles, accessed January 2024

### Chlamydia screening in 15 – 24 year olds

Although the National Chlamydia Screening Programme now focuses on young women, data on chlamydia screening and detection for the whole Bristol population aged 15-24 is available. In 2022, 12.6% of 15–24-year-olds were tested for chlamydia; this was significantly lower than the 15.2% recorded nationally. Whilst the number of tests conducted dropped in 2021 and 2022 from 2020, the proportion of tests that were positive increased (table 1). The number of tests carried out in Bristol is 40.8% lower than in 2019 and Bristol has the second lowest detection rate of the English Core Cities (fig 2).

| Age 15 - 24 |                             |  |
|-------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Year        | Number of tests carried out | Proportion of tests that were positive |
| 2017        | 18,676                      | 6.96%                                  |
| 2018        | 20,413                      | 7.40%                                  |
| 2019        | 16,194                      | 8.33%                                  |
| 2020        | 12,387                      | 7.14%                                  |
| 2021        | 7,885                       | 10.49%                                 |
| 2022        | 9,582                       | 12.36%                                 |

Table 1: Number of chlamydia tests and positivity rate by year in 15-24 year olds via OHID Sexual and Reproductive Health Profiles, accessed October 2023

<sup>1</sup> As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020 the Government implemented national and regional lockdowns and social and physical distancing measures. These measures affected sexual behaviour and health service provision, which is reflected in sexual and reproductive health indicator data. Interpreting data from 2020 should consider these factors, especially when comparing with data from pre-pandemic years.

The latest data on the detection of chlamydia shows that after two years of lower detection, the rate has increased in 2022 to 1,563 per 100,000 but is below the national average of 1,680 per 100,000.

Since chlamydia is most often asymptomatic, a high detection rate can reflect success at identifying infections that, if left untreated, may lead to serious reproductive health consequences. In order to address the falling number of chlamydia tests taken by 15-24 year olds in Bristol, Unity Sexual Health have developed a chlamydia screening action plan that identifies steps the team will take to improve access to and raise awareness of screening in the community.

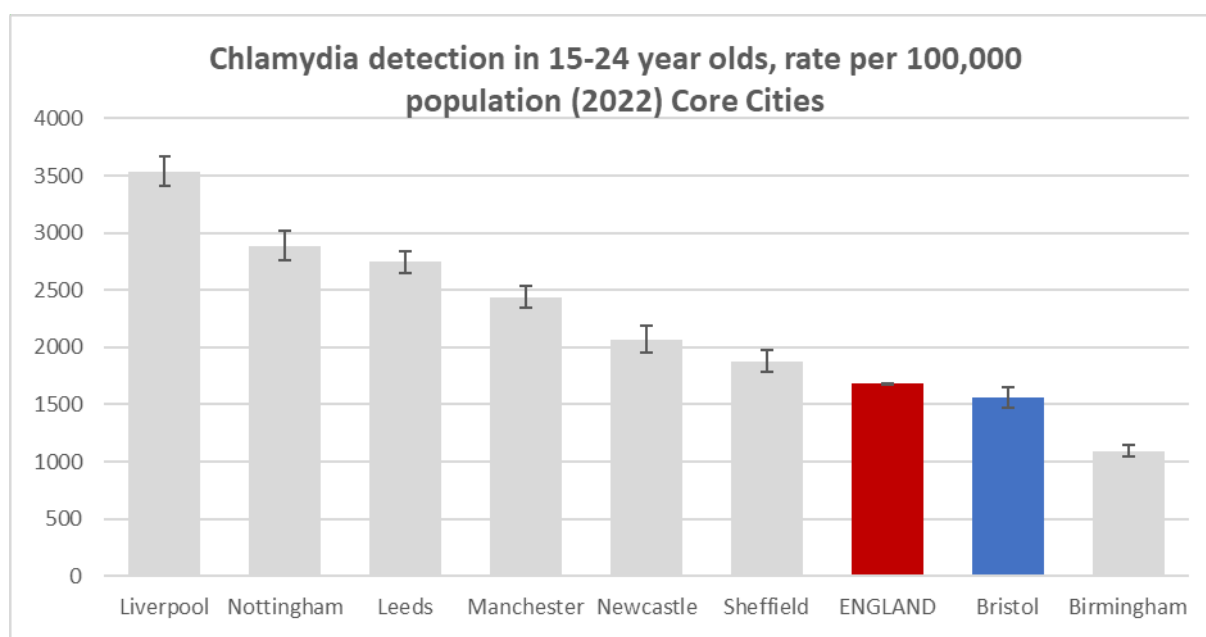


Fig 2: Chlamydia detection rate in people aged 15-24, Bristol v England, via OHID Sexual and Reproductive Health Profiles, accessed October 2023

### Chlamydia in 25+ year olds

Chlamydia is much less common in people over 25 and therefore they are not included in the National Chlamydia Screening Programme. The chlamydia diagnostic rate for people aged 25+ had been increasing since 2014 in Bristol and was consistently above the national rate. The rate fell slightly in 2019, despite very high testing rates and continued to fall in 2020 and 2021, probably as a consequence of the pandemic. In 2022 the rate has increased and is again higher than the national average (217 per 100,000) (fig 3). A total of 755 people aged over 25 were diagnosed with chlamydia in Bristol in 2022.

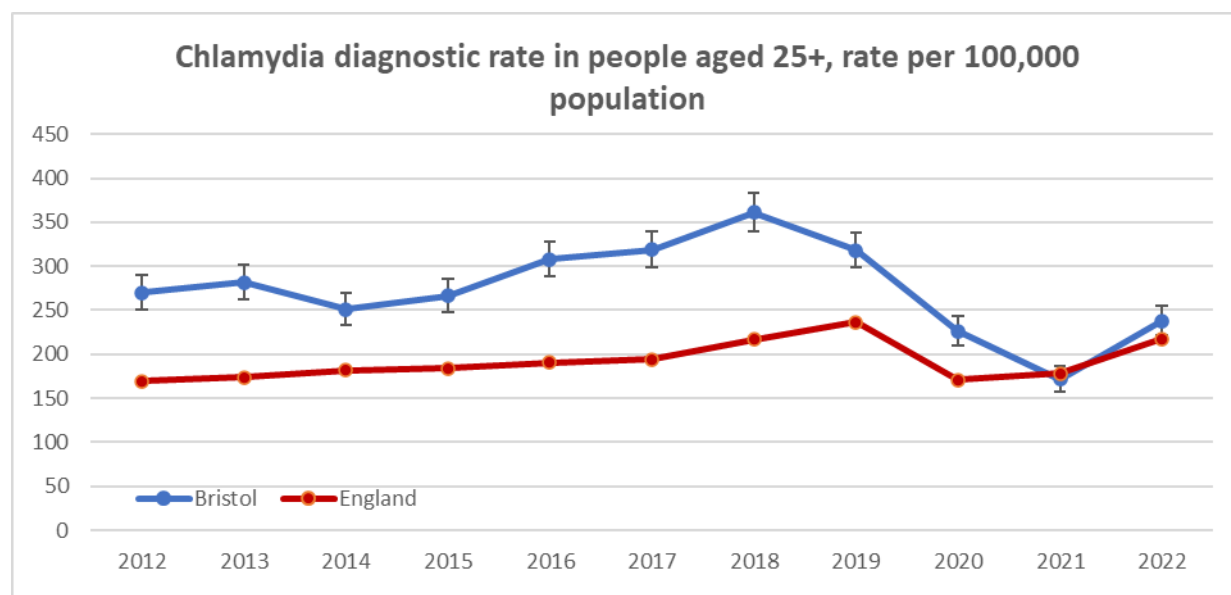


Fig 3: Chlamydia diagnostic rate in people aged 25+, Bristol v England, via OHID Sexual and Reproductive Health Profiles, accessed October 2023

## Equalities data

In Bristol the total number of chlamydia tests for all ages in 2022 was 27,691 with 1,939 (7.0%) positive diagnoses recorded. The highest positivity rate in all ages was among 15-24 year olds (12.4%). Within this age range, the 15-19 age group had the highest positivity (13.6%). Across all age categories more females tested for chlamydia (72%) than males (24%) in 2022, and of those tested in any age group, 4% had an unknown gender.

In relation to ethnicity, 37% of all age tests were taken by people identifying as White British, while 46% were taken by people whose ethnicity was either unknown or not stated. In the 15-24 age group, 30% of tests were taken by people identifying as White British and 59% were taken by people whose ethnicity was either unknown or not stated. The lack of ethnicity data makes it impossible to draw any conclusions around the scale of chlamydia by ethnicity.

There were 1,184 diagnoses of chlamydia among 15-24 year olds in Bristol in 2022. Of these, gender was known for 1,056 diagnoses (89%) with 30% of positives in males, and 70% in females. The chlamydia detection rate in females aged 15-24 year olds was 1,934 per 100,000 compared to 844 per 100,000 for males aged 15-24 (fig 4). This is likely to reflect different levels of engagement with health services and the change in focus of the chlamydia screening programme to young females only. There are more long-term health implications for females than males if chlamydia is left untreated.

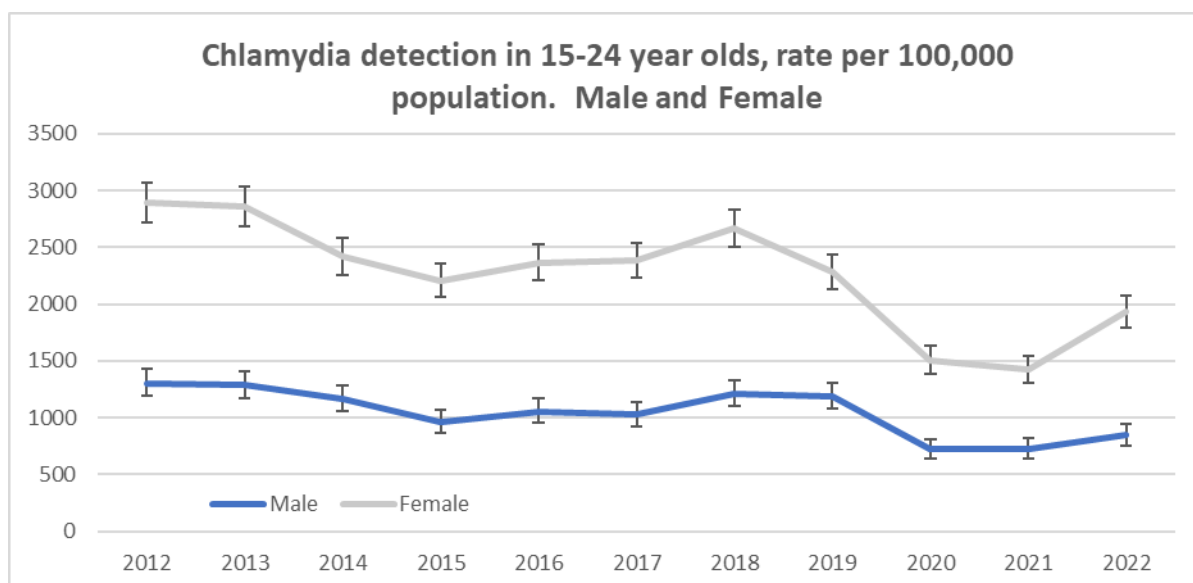


Fig 4: Chlamydia detection rate in people aged 15-24, Bristol, via OHID Sexual and Reproductive Health Profiles, accessed October 2023

### Covid-19 impact:

The introduction of national Covid-19 lockdowns in March 2020, with their focus on social and physical distancing and staying at home, led to a marked reduction in the capacity for face to face consultations at sexual health clinics. This resulted in a rapid reconfiguration of local services to increase access to STI testing online and via telephone consultations.

It's unclear why there was such a reduction in chlamydia diagnoses reported between 2018 and 2019 for young women. However, the drop between 2019 and 2020 is likely due to the impact of Covid-19 and the combination of reduced testing due to sexual health service disruption and changes in behaviour. Nonetheless the considerable numbers of diagnoses in 2020 and 2021 is clear evidence of sustained chlamydia transmission despite the lockdown restrictions, driven largely by the young population of Bristol. In 2022 the diagnosis rate in all ages started to increase following the reductions seen during Covid-19, but the number being screening is below pre-Covid-19 levels.

### Further data / links:

- Public Health England Sexual and Reproductive Health Profiles:  
<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/sexualhealth>
- Chlamydia: surveillance, data, screening and management  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/chlamydia-surveillance-data-screening-and-management>
- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs): annual data tables  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/sexually-transmitted-infections-stis-annual-data-tables>

**Date updated:** January 2024

**Date of next update:** October 2024