

'The Elephant in the Room'

Sexual Health Communications Toolkit 2026

(v16 27/02/2026)

The Elephant in the Room

The NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB), in partnership with UKHSA, OHID, Directors of Public Health and public health teams, across all our region's local authorities have developed the '**Elephant in the Room**' campaign. Its aim is to raise awareness of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), promote confidential and FREE sexual health advice and services, and encourage safer sexual health behaviours among young people.

Background

The North East has some of the highest sexually transmitted infection (STI) rates in the country. STIs, especially in young people aged 15-24, have increased since 2019, with rates of gonorrhoea and chlamydia of particular concern.

The '**Elephant in the Room**' campaign aims to reduce the stigma associated with sex and sexual health by encouraging honest conversations among young people, as well as increasing condom use and testing, to help reduce the transmission and harm from STIs.

The [Elephant in the room digital toolkit](#) is available for use and adaptation by all communication leads across the NHS, local authorities and other partners, to encourage uptake of STI testing, condom usage and general sexual health advice.



So, how can you help?

Information and content in the toolkit can be used on websites, social media, or other communication channels.

More content will be shared as we roll out the campaign. If there's something missing from the toolkit, or you would like something specific for your own organisation, channel, or simply have an idea of how we could better reach young people or share our messages, then please get in touch.

Your support in raising awareness of safe sex and sexual health is very much appreciated.

For further help or advice on using the toolkit or if you need support to tailor any assets, please contact: Andrea Jones, andrea.jones2@nhs.net or Anisah Sharmeen, anisah.sharmeen@nhs.net. If you work within a local authority, please contact your public health communications team.

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Campaign aim

To increase awareness and educate young people, aged 15-24, about STIs; promoting safe sex, including condom use, regular testing and how to access confidential sexual health services and information.

Key messages

- Your sexual health is just as important as your physical and mental health
- If you're having sex, use condoms and get tested regularly for STIs
- Not all STIs show symptoms, so people may have an infection without knowing, meaning it can be passed on without realising and still cause serious long-term health problems
- Testing is quick, simple and confidential
- Condoms and STI testing are FREE to access, online and in person from local sexual health services
- There's no judgement – sexual health services have heard it all before!

Who are we targeting?

- Young people – age 15 - 24
- Those who are sexually active, or are thinking about becoming sexually active

What young people told us (survey 15- 24yr-olds) - things to consider when you're using the campaign locally:

- Young people preferred messaging that was clear, direct and struck a balance between being engaging and professional.
- They would be uncomfortable interacting with sexual health content in highly visible public spaces, such as school corridors. By engaging, we mean things like scanning a QR code in a busy area, felt unrealistic to young people.
- They were more open to engaging with the content in private or semi-private settings, like toilet cubicles, changing rooms.
- They were comfortable seeing sexual health messaging in expected public spaces, such as interior bus panels, but were unlikely to interact with or act on it immediately while in public.

Advertising

The campaign will be supported by a limited three-month, paid-for, regional media advertising buy. This will have a multi-channel approach, including:

- Hyper-targeted paid social media (YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat)
- Digital audio (Spotify, radio)
- Out of Home (OOH) and transport advertising

Regional paid for media buy details and schedule

Media	Detail	Scheduled
Paid for social media - Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, Google Display	Hyper targeted 18-24 yrs across NE/NC	2 March – 31 May (12 weeks)
Bus adverts (depots) Darlington – DL1 1NU, Gateshead Riverside – NE11 9DH, Hexham – NE46 1PF, Newcastle/Percy Main – NE29 7AP, Consett/Stanley – DH8 7NU, Washington – NE37 3AB	300 x bus interior panels x 4 weeks across relevant bus depots	27 April – 25 May (4 weeks)
Digital audio ad – Spotify and Audio XI	Geo-target to NE and NC, targeting users in relevant age brackets e.g. 13 - 17 and 18 - 24.	9 March – 13 April (6 weeks)
Student targeting - Geo-verified mobile app network campaign	Target 15–24-year-old audiences within ICB catchment areas, prioritising locations with higher engagement and relevant population profiles.	9 March – 6 April (4 weeks)

Ideas for promoting the campaign in your area

Partner amplification across local authority, NHS and voluntary sector channels will be integral to the success of the campaign by linking with key stakeholders, including schools, colleges, universities, sexual health services and youth groups.

Insights from young people tell us:

- Messaging should be clear, direct and credible
- Interaction in highly visible public spaces is unlikely
- Private or semi-private spaces (toilets, changing rooms) are preferred
- Expected public spaces (e.g. buses) are acceptable for awareness, even if not immediate action

Here are some ideas to promote the campaign, but we appreciate that some of these will be based on the needs of your population, budgets and settings.

- Posters in toilets and private spaces, such as changing rooms in places used by young people such as schools, colleges and universities
- Pop-up stands in shopping centres/high footfall areas
- Youth events - posters
- Music venues - posters
- Sports and leisure facilities
- Drinks coasters in social venues
- Digital screens
- Websites
- Bus Adshels/carriage cards

Download the campaign assets

All campaign assets for the **Elephant in the Room** sexual health campaign are available to download from the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) toolkit page.

Download here: [Elephant in the room digital toolkit](#)

We are asking colleagues and partners across the region to join us and help spread the word - it's time to talk about the **Elephant in the Room**. By working together, we know that our messages are stronger and can reach many more of our communities, which means more people get tested, use protection and stop the spread of STIs.

Assets available in the toolkit:

- Pop-up stand design for shopping centres etc.
- Posters in varying sizes (with bleed)
- Drinks coaster design (for social venues)
- Digital screen designs
- Bus carriage card design (school buses)
- Web hero banner - various shapes/sizes
- Animations
- Videos
- Adshel/six sheet

Production of physical assets

Any production costs for the above assets from the toolkit (e.g. banners, posters, printed materials) will need to be covered locally. Central support is limited to the provision of **artwork only**.



Visit the Elephant in the Room campaign landing page

A dedicated campaign landing page has been created, which is hosted by the ICB, to signpost people to existing information about

- Sexual health advice
- Testing
- Accessing free condoms
- Contraception information

This includes educational, informative videos from frontline health professionals and young service users (embedded from ICB's YouTube channel).

The page signposts to advice from Brook Advisory, NHS.UK and local sexual health services and condom distribution.

This will be the **main call to action** from all campaign materials – alongside messages about accessing FREE confidential advice, testing and condoms,

Visit the campaign landing page here – www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk

Newsletter/website copy for stakeholders/partners

Let's get people talking – let's talk about the Elephant in the Room!

It's time to stop avoiding the awkward stuff.

STI rates in our region are among the highest in the UK and more young people, aged 15 – 24, are being diagnosed with chlamydia and gonorrhoea.

But a new campaign is hoping to change that and get people talking.

The **Elephant in the Room** encourages young people to talk openly about sex, use condoms, get tested and access confidential sexual health services - no judgement. Just facts, support and better health.

The campaign's key messages include:

- If you're having sex, protect yourself with condoms and regular testing
- Many STIs don't show any symptoms, so people may have an infection without knowing, meaning it can be passed on without realising and still cause serious long-term health problems
- Testing is confidential and simple
- You're not alone – support is available (and they've seen it all before!)

We'd love your help to spread the word. The more people we reach, the more we can support better sexual health across the region. Find out more at: www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk

Download the '**Elephant in the Room**' digital campaign toolkit here: [Elephant in the room digital toolkit](#)

The campaign toolkit is packed with ready-to-use content for websites, social media and other channels, which is easy to share and easy to use.

Got an idea? Noticed something missing? Want something tailored for your audience? We'd love to hear from you - contact Andrea Jones – andrea.jones2@nhs.net, or Anisah Sharmeen – anisah.sharmeen@nhs.net

Newsletter/website copy for young people

Having sex? Thinking about it?

Let's talk about the **elephant in the room** - your sexual health!

Looking after your sexual health is just as important as your physical and mental health - but we get it... it can feel awkward to talk about.

Here's the thing, some STIs, like chlamydia and gonorrhoea, don't always show symptoms, which means they can be passed on without anyone knowing and still cause serious long-term health problems. That's why it's important to use condoms every time you have sex - it's one of the best ways to protect yourself and others. We also recommend getting tested regularly - it's free, quick, simple and confidential.

Want to know more? Visit www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk to:

- Check where you can get free condoms
- Find your nearest STI testing clinic (or order an at-home test kit)
- Get clear, trusted sexual health advice from Brook

No judgement.

No embarrassment.

Just support, whenever you need it.

Social media

Please tag us in your social media posts - #ElephantInTheRoom

Facebook - NorthEastandNorthCumbriaNHS

X - @NENC_NHS

Instagram - nenc_nhs

TikTok - @nenc_icb

LinkedIn - @north-east-and-north-cumbria-nhs

YouTube - North East and North Cumbria NHS

We would recommend local amplification of the campaign on the following social media

channels – please put all campaign links in the comments – some platforms reduce the reach of posts with external links, placing the link in the comments can help increase visibility.

- Instagram
- TikTok
- YouTube
- Snapchat
- Google Display

Elephant in the Room campaign | Social

Post	Instagram	Facebook	X	Visual/Film
<p>Encouraging people to get tested - STIs</p>	<p>It's time to talk about the elephant in the room!</p> <p>Having sex? Thinking about it?</p> <p>PROTECT YOURSELF against STIs like chlamydia and gonorrhoea.</p> <p>For FREE confidential advice, testing and condoms, visit: elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	<p>It's time to talk about the elephant in the room!</p> <p>Having sex? Thinking about it?</p> <p>PROTECT YOURSELF against STIs like chlamydia and gonorrhoea.</p> <p>For FREE confidential advice, testing and condoms, visit: www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	<p>It's time to talk about the elephant in the room!</p> <p>Having sex? Thinking about it?</p> <p>PROTECT YOURSELF against STIs like chlamydia and gonorrhoea.</p> <p>For FREE confidential advice, testing and condoms, visit: www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	 <p>Put links in comments</p>

Post	Instagram	Facebook	X	Visual/Film
<p>Free condoms/testing</p>	<p>It's time to talk about the elephant in the room! Yeah, we're talking safer sex!</p> <p>PROTECT YOURSELF against STIs like chlamydia and gonorrhoea.</p> <p>If you've had sex without a condom – GET TESTED For free testing, condoms and confidential safe sex advice visit elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	<p>It's time to talk about the elephant in the room! Yeah, we're talking safer sex!</p> <p>PROTECT YOURSELF against STIs like chlamydia and gonorrhoea.</p> <p>If you've had sex without a condom – GET TESTED For free testing, condoms and confidential safe sex advice visit www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	<p>It's time to talk about the elephant in the room! Yeah, we're talking safer sex!</p> <p>PROTECT YOURSELF against STIs like chlamydia and gonorrhoea.</p> <p>If you've had sex without a condom – GET TESTED For free testing, condoms and confidential safe sex advice visit www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	 <p>Put links in comments</p>
Post	Instagram	Facebook	X	Visual/Film
<p>Free confidential safe sex advice, testing and condoms</p>	<p>Having sex? Thinking about having sex?</p> <p>PROTECT YOURSELF against STIs like gonorrhoea and chlamydia.</p> <p>For free confidential safe sex advice, testing and condoms visit elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	<p>Having sex? Thinking about having sex?</p> <p>PROTECT YOURSELF against STIs like gonorrhoea and chlamydia.</p> <p>For free confidential safe sex advice, testing and condoms visit www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	<p>Having sex? Thinking about having sex?</p> <p>PROTECT YOURSELF against STIs like gonorrhoea and chlamydia.</p> <p>For free confidential safe sex advice, testing and condoms visit www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	 <p>Put links in comments</p>

Post	Instagram	Facebook	X	Visual/Film
<p>Protect yourself</p>	<p>Having sex?</p> <p>Protect yourself!</p> <p>If you're sexually active, use condoms and get tested regularly. Some STIs don't show symptoms, so they can be passed on without you knowing and still cause serious long-term health problems.</p> <p>The good news?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Free condoms ✓ Free STI testing ✓ Online testing available ✓ Totally confidential ✓ No judgement <p>Find free, confidential sexual health services at www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	<p>Having sex?</p> <p>Protect yourself!</p> <p>If you're sexually active, use condoms and get tested regularly - some STIs don't show symptoms, so they can be passed on without you knowing and still cause serious long-term health problems.</p> <p>The good news?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Free condoms ✓ Free STI testing ✓ Online testing available ✓ Totally confidential ✓ No judgement <p>Find free, confidential sexual health services at www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	<p>Having sex?</p> <p>Protect yourself!</p> <p>Some STIs don't have symptoms - so they can be passed on without you knowing.</p> <p>Use condoms and get tested regularly.</p> <p>For</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Free condoms ✓ Free STI testing ✓ Online testing available ✓ Confidential ✓ No judgement <p>Visit www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	 <p>Put links in comments</p>

Post	Instagram	Facebook	X	Visual/Film
<p>Your sexual health matters just as much as your physical and mental health</p>	<p>Let's talk about the elephant in the room!</p> <p>Having sex? Thinking about having sex?</p> <p>Your sexual health matters just as much as your physical and mental health - and it's important to talk about it.</p> <p>For free, confidential, safe sex advice, testing and condoms, visit www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	<p>Let's talk about the elephant in the room!</p> <p>Having sex? Thinking about having sex?</p> <p>Your sexual health matters just as much as your physical and mental health - and it's important to talk about it.</p> <p>For free, confidential, safe sex advice, testing and condoms visit www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	<p>Let's talk about the elephant in the room!</p> <p>Having sex? Thinking about having sex?</p> <p>Your sexual health matters just as much as your physical and mental health - and it's important to talk about it.</p> <p>For free, confidential, safe sex advice, testing and condoms visit www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	 <p>Put links in comments</p>

Post	Instagram	Facebook	X	Visual/Film
Let's keep talking about the elephant in the room.	<p>Let's keep talking about the elephant in the room.</p> <p>Your sexual health!</p> <p>Not all STIs have symptoms - but testing, including home testing, is quick, simple, confidential and FREE</p> <p>Condoms are free too.</p> <p>No judgement. No pressure. Just support.</p> <p>Find free, confidential advice, testing and condoms at elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	<p>Let's keep talking about the elephant in the room.</p> <p>Your sexual health!</p> <p>Not all STIs have symptoms - but testing, including home testing, is quick, simple, confidential and FREE.</p> <p>Condoms are free too.</p> <p>No judgement. No pressure. Just support.</p> <p>Find free, confidential advice, testing and condoms at www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	<p>Let's keep talking about the elephant in the room.</p> <p>Your sexual health!</p> <p>Not all STIs have symptoms - but testing, including home testing, is quick, simple, confidential and FREE.</p> <p>Condoms are free too.</p> <p>No judgement. No pressure. Just support.</p> <p>Find free, confidential advice, testing and condoms at www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	<p>Put links in comments</p>
Post	Instagram	Facebook	X	Visual/Film
Trusted Voices – information videos from sexual health care professionals	<p>Getting an STI test for the first time might feel a bit embarrassing, but don't worry.</p> <p>Sexual health nurses are used to talking about the</p>	<p>Getting an STI test for the first time might feel a bit embarrassing, but don't worry.</p> <p>Sexual health nurses are used to talking about the</p>	<p>Getting an STI test for the first time might feel a bit embarrassing, but don't worry.</p> <p>Sexual health nurses are used to talking about the</p>	Trusted voices video

	<p>'elephant in the room.' Psst;.... Your sexual health! And don't worry, they have seen it all before!</p> <p>Visit our website to learn more about safe sex and how to protect yourself www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	<p>'elephant in the room.' Psst;.... Your sexual health! And don't worry, they have seen it all before!</p> <p>Visit our website to learn more about safe sex and how to protect yourself www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	<p>elephant in the room.</p> <p>Visit our website to learn more about safe sex and how to protect yourself www.elephant-in-the-room.co.uk</p> <p>#ElephantInTheRoom</p>	
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Trusted voices videos

We're launching a series of short form videos that tackle the **elephant in the room**, busting myths, stigma, and awkwardness to deliver honest, helpful sexual health information and advice

Each video will:

- Bust common myths
- Offer simple, practical advice
- Show how to get tested and find support
- Normalise real talk about sexual health

Our video stars will be sexual health professionals and young people with real-life experience - trusted, relatable voices sharing what matters.

Do you know someone who could be a great trusted voice? Email Anisah Sharmeen Anisah.sharmeen@nhs.net or Andrea Jones andrea.jones2@nhs.net with their details.

(YouTube video links to be inserted when available)

Press release - Local authority public health communications leads will be able to issue a template press release, using local spokespersons for their area, following the regional release.

Embargoed until after regional release w/c 9 March 2026

Let's Talk About 'The Elephant in the Room' - Safer Sex

Campaign launched to tackle Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) rates in the region

(Release will be forwarded to local authority public health communication leads following regional release w/c 9 March 2026)