

Teens having more sex, younger

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Increasing rates of chlamydia among young people are proof that teenagers are having sex with more partners at a younger age than 20 years ago, doctors say.

The prevalence of chlamydia in people aged 19 and under nearly doubled nationally between 2003 (538 cases per 100,000 people) and 2008 (1033 cases).

President of the Australasian Chapter of Sexual Health Medicine, Dr Darren Russell said the figures reflected youth sexual behaviour trends.

The most recent National Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health report indicated an increase in the sexual activity of young people, with one in four Year 10 and one in two Year 12 students reporting vaginal intercourse in the 12 months prior to the survey.

The study also suggested those who were sexually active were more promiscuous, with approximately one in three boys in Year 10 reporting three or more sexual partners in the previous year - up 48.63% on figures from five years earlier.

Asked about the accuracy of such figures, Dr Russell said there was little reason to doubt the reliability of the data as participants in anonymous surveys were generally honest.

"The rising rate of chlamydia alone, which can only be passed on sexually, correlates with the findings in such research," he said.

Cecelia Gore, Director of Education at Family Planning Queensland, said more sex education was needed to halt the spread of chlamydia.

"There is a very vocal minority that think if you talk about sex with young people, you will make them have sex, that it takes away children's innocence," she said. "We know this is not the case."

Ms Gore said young people themselves had been calling for more sex education for years.

"They're the ones that know what's going on at their level, that know about how many people they or their friends are sleeping with and how often they're getting tested for STIs," she said.

Dr Russell said young people were following a common pattern of sexual behaviour, starting off with mutual masturbation and progressing to oral and vaginal sex with girls often just as likely to be the initiators of sexual activity as boys.

"There are some real problems in the public discourse on the subject at the moment because there are a lot of mixed messages out there," Dr Russell said.

"In general, a lot of people still feel uncomfortable with the idea of young people having sex and many don't seem to remember their own experience at that age.

"From a public health point of view, you want an open environment that enables parents, teachers and health professionals to talk about sex with young kids and gain trust and understanding."

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/teens-having-more-sex-younger-20090616-cgev.html>