

MEDIA RELEASE

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Cairns travellers at risk of sexual infections

Heterosexual men in Cairns who travel to countries where HIV is prevalent have been identified as a small but significant population at risk of HIV transmission.

In 2007, 20 per cent of all new HIV diagnoses in Cairns were acquired by heterosexual males reporting sexual contact in Papua New Guinea (PNG), compared with 6 per cent in 2006, according to the latest Queensland Health figures.

In response to this increase, Queensland Health has funded Family Planning Queensland (FPQ) to develop a Cairns based awareness raising campaign advocating safer sex practices amongst males travelling between Cairns and neighbouring high prevalence countries, with a particular focus on Papua New Guinea.

“It’s an unusual demographic to target in relation to HIV awareness. We’re not used to hearing much about HIV and the heterosexual population,” said FPQ Project Officer, Rowena Harper.

“It’s important to remember how close we are to many countries with high rates of HIV. Places such as PNG have higher rates and different patterns of infection than Australia. It is estimated that 1 in 50 people in PNG have HIV, and more women than men are reported to be infected,” continued Ms Harper.

FPQ Cairns is working with locally based employers, travel and health services to raise awareness of the risk of HIV and other STIs among heterosexual males travelling overseas from Cairns for work or holidays.

Ms Harper stated that: “There are many factors that influence a person’s choice to practise safer sex.

“Many people travel between Far North Queensland and PNG, particularly for work purposes. Because rates of HIV infection are so low in Australia it’s easy to become complacent in practising safer sex.”

“We’re currently carrying out research with men in the local community who travel to countries with a high prevalence of HIV to come up with some messages and ways of communicating them that will be effective to this target group,” said Ms Harper.

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