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Aussies dice with STIs by having unprotected sex

Almost all sexually active Australians say they have had unprotected sex, and yet more than half say they have never had a test for a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

A poll of more than 1000 people aged 18 to 40 also found unsafe sex was reported right through the group and not just among young people.

"The majority of safe sex campaigns are targeted at youth these days, yet this research shows that 35- to 40-year-olds are just as exposed to unsafe sex practices," said Jill Michelson, national clinical adviser for Marie Stopes International.

"More needs to be done to get the message to them to stop."

The research, launched yesterday to mark the start of Sexual Health Week 2009, found 56.2 per cent of the respondents had never had a test for an STI.

When it came to the question of having sex at least once without a condom, 93.1 per cent said they'd had unprotected sex.

Other key findings show that six in 10 of the adults who reported ever having unprotected sex said they'd since not had a STI check-up.

Almost half (47.5 per cent) of those who said they were not in a monogamous relationship when they last had unprotected sex were aged 35 to 40 years.

Those in the age brackets 18 to 24 and 35 to 40 were the least likely to have ever had an

STI check-up.

And women were much more likely than men to have had an STI check-up – with 51 per cent of women compared to 36 per cent of men saying they'd had at least one.

The research was conducted in October, and Ms Michelson said it came after the nation's rate of new chlamydia cases reached a new peak of almost 60,000 notifications last year.

"Australians just don't seem to be getting the message (that) regular STI check-ups and condom usage are the only way to safeguard your sexual health," Ms Michelson said.

"This Sexual Health Week, we're calling on all Australians to do their bit for the country's sexual health and have an STI check-up.

"STIs and unplanned pregnancy are key health issues that affect many Australians, and we're hoping ... we can raise the bar when it comes to the level of sexual health knowledge out there, and at the same time decrease the statistics."

Marie Stopes International is a not-for-profit sexual and reproductive healthcare provider with centres in the ACT, Victoria, NSW, Queensland and WA.

Sexual Health Week is supported by Family Planning Queensland and Sexual Health & Family Planning ACT.

More information can be found at www.sexualhealthweek.com.au