

# STD rates rising as condom use falls

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COMPLACENCY about safe sex is believed to be causing skyrocketing rates of infection for diseases like chlamydia and syphilis in Australia.

Chlamydia was the most frequently reported sexually transmitted infection last year, at a rate of 238 people per 100,000, up from 57 in 1998, the *Australia's Health 2008* report says.

And notifications of infectious syphilis increased from 3.1 per 100,000 people in 2004 to 5.7 in 2007.

University of NSW sexual health professor Basil Donovan likened the complacency to the early 1990s when heterosexuals became less vigilant about HIV and stopped using condoms.

"This is not isolated to Australia; the whole western world is seeing this problem," Dr Donovan said.

He said chlamydia was an easily cured bacterial infection but if left untreated could cause long-term fertility problems.

He said people should always use condoms with new partners and urged young men and young women to get screened for chlamydia.

"To be tested all you have to do is pee in a jar. If you can't do that go have a beer and come back in 20 minutes," he said.

Family Planning Queensland clinical nurse manager Margot Kingston said men were particularly complacent to the threat of chlamydia which can have no obvious symptoms of infection.

"There are misconceptions about who's at risk," she said.

"There are skewed views that there are certain groups who get it but not the nice, clean young people but that is not true."

*Australia's Health 2008* included research showing only 45 per cent of males and 35 per cent of females always used condoms with casual sex partners.

And just 8 per cent of males and 6 per cent of females always used a condom in the past year for sexual activity with a regular partner.

About 20 per cent of homosexual men were having unprotected sex, the report said.