

Timely Topics: Adolescent development and sexuality

During adolescence there is an increasing awareness of sexuality issues. Young people want to enjoy their sexual experiences and to have the knowledge, skills and opportunities to make healthy decisions about relationships and safer sex.

Research indicates that sexuality education is instrumental in delaying the onset of sexual activity, and in helping adolescents to make clear and informed decisions about risk taking and safe sex.

FPQ advocates for youth engagement and sexuality education for all young people.

Key points and statistics about adolescent sexuality

According to WHO statistics, for people born between 1964 and 1968 in four major developed countries, (including Australia), median ages at first sexual intercourse were: USA 17.3 (male) and 17.5 (female), UK 16.5 (male) and 17.5 (female), France 17.5 (male) and 18.5 (female), Australia 17.5 (male) and 17.5 (female), (WHO statistics). However, most recent data shows that the median age in Australia has further declined to 16 years.¹

Statistics from an Australian context in the Secondary students' survey

- 78% have experienced some form of sexual activity
- 30% report having more than three sexual partners in a year
- 69% reported using a condom the last time they had sex
- Less than 1 in 10 students believed they were at risk of infection with HIV/AIDS, an STI, hepatitis B or hepatitis C
- 1 in 10 students reported their most recent sexual encounter was with someone of the same sex
- Most students (88%) had sought information regarding sexual health.²

Key research

The association between sex education and youth's engagement in sexual intercourse, age at first intercourse, and birth control use at first sex.

Mueller TE, Gavin LE, Kulkarni A.

Journal of Adolescent Health, 2008, Jan; 42(1):89-96

Sex education is intended to provide youth with the information and skills needed to make healthy and informed decisions about sex. This study examined whether exposure to formal sex education is associated with engagement in sexual activity. Formal sex education may effectively reduce adolescent sexual risk behaviours when provided before sexual initiation. Sex education was found to be particularly

¹<http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/Life-stages/sexual-and-reproductive-health/activities/young-people/key-facts-on-young-people-and-reproductive-health>.

² Smith, Anthony et al. (2009) Secondary students and sexual health 2008: results of the 4th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students, HIV/AIDS and Sexual Health, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society

important for subgroups that are traditionally at high risk for early initiation of sex and for contracting sexually transmitted diseases at first intercourse.

Sexual intercourse and oral sex among public middle school students: prevalence and correlates.

De Rosa CJ, Ethier KA, Kim DH, Cumberland WG, Afifi AA, Kotlerman J, Loya RV, Kerndt PR.

Perspectives in sexual and reproductive health, 2010, Sep; 42(3):197-205.

Data from a 2005 survey of 4,557 sixth, seventh and eighth grade students at 14 urban public schools in Southern California were analyzed to identify correlates of oral sex, intercourse and both. Findings indicated that interventions addressing oral sex, intercourse and multiple partners should begin before sixth grade and continue throughout the middle school years and should target adolescent risk reduction counselling toward males, blacks, youth with a boyfriend or girlfriend, and those with a friend who has been involved in a pregnancy.

Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2008. Results of the 4th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students, HIV/AIDS and Sexual Health

Smith, Anthony, Agius, Paul, Mitchell, Anne, Barrett, Catherine and Marian Pitts, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, 2009.

The Fourth National Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health involved nearly 3,000 Year 10 and Year 12 students from more than 100 secondary schools from the Government, Catholic and Independent school systems and from every jurisdiction in Australia. The key findings are arranged under the key themes of knowledge, behaviour and health.

FPQ work in the area

In 2008-2009, FPQ engaged with over 200 young people through informal focus groups to gather their opinions on what constitutes youth-friendly health services, as well as to better understand what they know about sexual health and blood borne viruses. The results of these focus groups were then shared with the youth sector workforce to help them prioritise sexual health and blood borne virus education in their work with young people.

In 2010, FPQ collaborated with students from the University of Southern Queensland's School of Creative Arts to transform this information into an online video resource for the youth sector workforce: *What young people know, like and need: Sexual health, blood borne viruses and youth-friendly services*.

The videos are available for viewing at www.fpq.com.au/youthproject/know.html

The *HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C and sexual health promotion with young people* CD is a self-directed activity-based learning resource available to the youth sector workforce. It focuses on working effectively with young people and aims to help the youth sector workforce prioritise sexual health and blood borne viruses as a part of their work with young people. The resource includes learning activities, links to internet resources and a range of other materials. Some of the topics covered include: sexuality and sexual health; young people and risk taking; contraception and unplanned pregnancy; and sexual violence prevention.

Contact Angela Wunsch awunsch@fpq.com.au

Adolescent Development Stages –

From Adolescent health GP resource kit, 2nd edition (2008), NSW Centre for the advancement of adolescent health. Available online at www.caah.chw.edu.au/resources/gpkit/Complete_GP_Resource_Kit.pdf

	Early (10 – 13 years)	Middle (14 – 17 years)	Late (17 – 21 years)
Central Question	“Am I normal?”	“Who am I?” “Where do I belong?”	“Where am I going?”
Major Developmental Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ coming to terms with puberty ▪ struggle for autonomy commences ▪ same sex peer relationships all important ▪ mood swings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ new intellectual powers ▪ new sexual drives ▪ experimentation and risk taking ▪ relationships have selfcentred quality ▪ need for peer group acceptance ▪ emergence of sexual identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ independence from parents ▪ realistic body image ▪ acceptance of sexual identity ▪ clear educational and vocational goals, own value system ▪ developing mutually caring and responsible relationships
Main concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ anxieties about body shape and changes ▪ comparison with peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ tensions between family and adolescent over independence ▪ balancing demands of family and peers ▪ prone to fad behaviour and risk taking ▪ strong need for privacy ▪ maintaining ethnic identity while striving to fit in with dominant culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ self-responsibility ▪ achieving economic independence ▪ deciding on career/vocation options ▪ developing intimate relationships
Cognitive development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ still fairly concrete thinkers ▪ less able to understand subtlety ▪ daydreaming common ▪ difficulty identifying how their immediate behaviour impacts on the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ able to think more rationally ▪ concerned about individual freedom and rights ▪ able to accept more responsibility for consequences of own behaviour ▪ begins to take on greater responsibility within family as part of cultural identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ longer attention span ▪ ability to think more abstractly ▪ more able to synthesise information and apply it to themselves ▪ able to think into the future and anticipate consequences of their actions

Useful resource links

Family Planning Queensland working with young people project

www.fpq.com.au/youthproject/index.html

FPQ is funded by Queensland Health to support the youth sector workforce to educate and inform young people about sexual health and blood borne viruses.

Queensland Health youth site

www.health.qld.gov.au/istaysafe/default.asp

The information contained in this site has been designed for adolescents and may not be suitable for younger children. Find the answers to questions such as what is sexual health? What is safe sex? Contraception · Sexual health checks · Sexually transmitted infections · Why it's good to talk about sex. Developed by Queensland Health for adolescents.

Likeitis- Puberty, peer pressure, teenage pregnancy, contraception, STIs

www.likeitis.org.au/

Likeitis will tell you everything you need to know exactly likeitis... with no frills, no judgements and definitely no holds barred! Developed, written and designed in consultation with young people, likeitis provides teenagers with access to information on sex education and teenage life, covering areas ranging from puberty to contraception. likeitis.org is an initiative of Marie Stopes International.

Schoolies- be safe and watch your mates

www.schoolies.qld.gov.au/safety/sex.asp

Information about the annual festival held at a number of sites across Queensland. Topics include safety tips about drinking, sexual activity and sun safety. There is also information about how to get information and guides for parents and for schoolies about staying safe.

Safer Schoolies Initiative

www.communityservices.qld.gov.au/youth/schoolies/

The Queensland Government does not promote participation in Schoolies. However, to respond to the influx of tens of thousands of young people into coastal areas, the government implements a state-wide Safer Schoolies Initiative.

The initiative involves partnerships with other agencies, community organisations and councils to minimise the disruption to communities and to enhance the safety and responsible behaviour of school leavers.

To improve safety and reduce the impact on local communities that host Schoolies, the Safer Schoolies initiative promotes:

- better coordination through partnerships
- increased safety
- increased awareness of rights and responsibilities.