

It's International Condom Day!

Share the love, not an STI

Days like these provide us with opportunities to challenge myths and promote behaviours that prevent unwanted, non-consensual sexual contact, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unplanned pregnancies.

Below are some juicy tidbits from recent research into what influences young people's condom use and how young people actually go about getting those slippery little suckers on.

We hope this helps to inform your programs and that it inspires interesting conversations with colleagues, family & friends and the young people you work with. This research shows that there are still lots of myths and misinformation about safer sex out there. One way to combat this is getting people to **talk about it** ♥

Factors that shape young people's sexual behaviour: a systematic review by C. Marston and E. King

These researchers performed a literature review of qualitative empirical studies of young people's sexual behaviour published between 1990-2004.

Some of the themes they identified were:

- ♥ Young people subjectively assess the risks of sexual partners on the basis of whether they are "clean" or "unclean"— how well they know them socially, their appearance, behaviour and social position.

"Depends how 'easy' she is. If she'd sleep with me the first night, I'd wear a condom. But if I met a girl who weren't that type of girl and started seeing her regular, then I'd trust her. I don't like wearing them."
– UK man, aged 20-24 years

- ♥ Condoms can be stigmatising and associated with lack of trust: carrying or buying condoms can imply sexual experience or imply that they think their partner is diseased.
- ♥ Social expectations hamper communication about sex— young people often avoid speaking openly to partners about sex, instead using deliberate miscommunication and ambiguity: women may avoid saying 'yes' directly to sexual activity in case they seem inappropriately willing. Discussing sex, which raises the possibility of sex, may lead to loss of face, rejection or hurting others' feelings. Avoiding talk about condom use keeps the option of refusing intercourse open.

from *The Lancet* (2006) vol 368 pp 1581-86

How, not just if, condoms are used: the timing of condom application and removal during vaginal sex among young people in England by B. Hatherall, R. Ingham, N. Stone and J. McEachran

Researchers in the UK have used data from 1373 young people's responses to sexual health questionnaires and sexual event (oral, anal or vaginal) diaries kept by 108 young people to illustrate how young people use condoms.

Findings included that imperfect condom use (eg application after initial penetration and continuing sexual activity after removal of condom) was fairly prevalent with up to 1/3 reporting at least one experience of non-optimal use over a 6-month period. Some factors associated with imperfect condom use were:

- ♥ Using condoms inconsistently (ie not every time)
- ♥ Not feeling confident that they know how to use a condom properly
- ♥ Using another method of contraception (eg The Pill)

Reasons given as to why young people applied the condom late were: intimacy, it feels better, other contraception was used, they got carried away.

The most common reasons young people gave for using condoms were: to avoid pregnancy, to avoid making a mess and to make sex last longer. *Prevention of STIs was only mentioned in one instance.*

from *Sexually Transmitted Infections* (2006) vol 000 pp1-3 www.stijournal.com

Writing themselves in again— 6 years on: the 2nd report on the sexuality, health and wellbeing of same sex attracted young Australians by L. Hillier, A. Turner and A. Mitchell

These researchers surveyed 1749 same sex attracted young people to find out about their experiences at home, school and in the community.

While these young people reported similar rates of condom use at their last sexual encounter as their heterosexual peers, they were five times more likely to report having been diagnosed with an STI.

Most young people recalled learning about safer heterosexual sex and relationships at home and at school but few learned anything about safer gay or lesbian sex. Eighty percent found school-based sexuality education barely or not at all useful. This may suggest young people “tune out” when they do not see themselves included in classes and so miss important health and safety information.

These findings indicate a need for detailed information about safer sex— more than just ‘wear a condom’. Learning activities for young people should include opportunities to practice correct condom use eg using sequence cards or applying condoms to models, as well as conversation starters that encourage them to communicate about safer sex and healthy relationships with their peers, inclusive of sexual diversity.

Some fast facts about STIs including HIV in Queensland

- ♥ Queensland is following a national trend of rising infection rates of HIV, chlamydia and gonorrhoea
- ♥ even with no symptoms STIs can make it:
 - 10 times easier to pass on HIV
 - 10 times easier to pick up HIV
- ♥ in 2005, Queensland recorded 150 new HIV diagnoses, up 55 percent since 2001
- ♥ state government & government-funded agencies are now treating and supporting 1,556 Queenslanders with HIV/AIDS
- ♥ chlamydia remains the most common STI with diagnoses increasing from 155 per 100,000 population in 2001 to 245 per 100,000 in 2005
- ♥ rates of gonorrhoea increased from 31 to 36 per 100,000 population between 2004 and 2005
- ♥ it's estimated that 5,000,000,000 condoms are used every year worldwide
- ♥ condoms, for all their colours and textures, have come a long way! In response to a syphilis epidemic in Europe in the 16th century, a man called Fallopio designed a condom that was made of linen and worn over the penis. It was recommended that the linen be soaked in a chemical solution and dried in the shade before use.
- ♥ latex condoms used with water based lubricant are the only form of contraception that is also highly effective in protecting against STIs including HIV

For more information about sexual health promotion and blood borne virus prevention as well as resources that are available to support working with young people, have a look at the following websites:

www.fpq.com.au
www.health.qld.gov.au/sexhealth
www.2totango.com.au
www.opendoors.net.au

www.qahc.org.au
www.istaysafe.com
www.uq.edu.au/qadrec/
www.likeitis.org.au

International Condom Day
♥ 14 February 2007 ♥
Share the love, not an STI