

Practise safe sex this summer and avoid an STI

Hunter New England Health is encouraging people to make sure they are practising safe sex as notifications of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) often increase over the summer months.

Chlamydia is now the most frequently notified disease in NSW with 12,391 cases in 2007. The number of cases in the Hunter New England Health region has more than doubled over the past five years. In 2007 there were 1,751 notifications, with 71 per cent (1,249) in the 15 to 24 years age group. In 1998 there were just 64 cases notified.

Young people under 26 years are most at risk and up to 10 per cent of people in this age group may be infected with chlamydia.

HNE Health Director of Sexual Health Dr Treeny Ooi said a sense of invincibility by young people as well as not realising they are at risk or could be infected is blamed for the trend.

"Many people with a chlamydia infection will not have any symptoms and may unwittingly pass the infection onto their partners.

"Chlamydia can lead to a number of health complications in both men and women," she said.

"The test for chlamydia is very simple and will only take a moment of your time – it's just a urine sample. No invasive testing is needed. Treatment is also easy, usually involving just a single dose of antibiotics.

"The only way to ensure that you do not have an STI such as chlamydia is to organise a sexual health check, it is a simple process and can be arranged by contacting your local doctor, sexual health clinic or Aboriginal Medical Service.

Young people should be reminded that condoms offer good protection against STIs and are an important part of staying safe during sex.

"Young people are aware of the benefits of condom use but it can be a very different story in the heat of the moment. People often don't consider themselves at risk, may not have condoms with them, or find it embarrassing to talk about using a condom with their partner," Dr Ooi said.

"People can help themselves and their partners by making condom use normal, and not something that has to be requested."

"The messages are simple. If you are sexually active, it is essential to use condoms and have regular sexual health check-ups at your GP, sexual health clinic or Aboriginal Medical Service so that you know you're STI free," Dr Ooi said.

For more information call the NSW Sexual Health Infoline on 1800 451 624.