

Chlamydia and Relationships

Intimate relationships

Intimate, or romantic, relationships often start during the teenage years. While younger teenagers often have crushes on people, by the mid to late teens, many young people become involved in direct, one-to-one relationships. These relationships do not necessarily involve sexual intercourse or any sexual contact, but the research shows that in Australia, most young people have experienced some forms of intimate contact by the age of 16. This includes kissing and light sexual touching. About one third of Australian high school students have had sexual intercourse by the age of 16 or 17, and about half by the age of 18. Many young people feel romantically and sexually attracted to people of the same sex as well and sexual contact is not necessarily just with someone of the opposite sex. It's very common for young people to wonder about their sexuality and experiment with different types of sexual behaviours and partners. This can happen throughout life but is usually more intense for young people (those under 25).

There are many reasons why romantic relationships and sexual experiences begin at this time. One of the most important reasons is that the body going through puberty is charged with high levels of what we call the 'sex hormones'. These hormones not only bring about the physical changes of puberty but also 'allow' the body to become sexually aroused. Hormones don't count for everything though. Plenty of people with adult levels of sex hormones do not want, need, or enjoy sex very often, while others do.

Experts think that there are other factors that are just as important as hormones when it comes to intimate relationships. Sometimes decisions about having sex, or using protection during sex, result from a lot of different influences, such as whether the person feels a desire to have sex, how they feel about their partner, whether they think their friends would approve, what they see and hear about in the media, and whether it fits with their beliefs and values about sex and what their family believes.

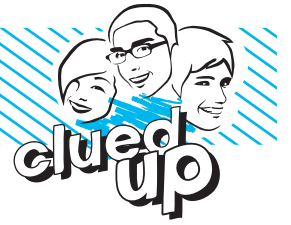
Two really important influences are family and friends. This is probably because the family you grow up in and the close friends you have during adolescence help you to work out what's important to you and who you want to be. This includes your ideas and values about relationships and sex. A person's gender, cultural background and factors such as religion can also be important influences. These factors probably also influence how a young person understands and develops opinions about health issues related to sex, such as sexually transmitted infections, including Chlamydia.

Friends

Friends are important at any age, but during adolescence the 'peer group' is extremely important. Decisions that a young person makes about how to behave and what to think or do often come after discussing the issue with their peer group or from observing what their peers are doing or saying. Young people in their late teens and early twenties are more likely to make decisions on their own, or with less emphasis on what their peer group thinks. Of course, everyone is different, so this is a generalisation. Being guided by the peer group is considered a healthy and normal part of growing up. It can sometimes lead to problems if a person feels they are under 'peer pressure' to do something they don't really want to do. This can include getting involved sexually. How much do you think your friends influence your ideas about sex and sexually transmitted infections like Chlamydia?

Partners

For a young person thinking about having sex, obviously a really important person to consider is their partner! Since sexual activity (usually) involves another person, the decision to have sex can't be made by just one person. A young person might feel pressured into having sex by their partner or feel confused about whether they are ready or not. They might already be sexually experienced but feel differently towards a new partner compared with a previous one. Research suggests that young people often worry about what their partner thinks about them sexually, whether they and their partner can please each other sexually, and how to communicate with their partner about sex and sexual practices. There might also be a difference about these concerns between young women and young men. Young women might find it difficult to ask their male partner to use a condom for example. Young men might think that they are supposed to 'know it all' when in fact they don't because they are inexperienced, and this can cause anxiety for them. These issues can come up for young people whose partners are of the same sex as well. How much do you think your partner/s influence your ideas about sex and sexually transmitted infections like Chlamydia?



Family

A young person's family is usually a very strong influence on their beliefs and attitudes about many things, including sex. A family might consist of a father and a mother, adopted parents, same-sex parents, single parents, step-parents and sometimes extended family, such as aunts, uncles and grandparents. While 'rebellious' against family can be part of adolescence, and although not all young people have good relationships with everyone in their family, it's true to say that family is very important to most young people. Parents or parental figures in a young person's life might express their opinions about sex and relationships by talking about them with the young person or from the things they say or do in their day to day life. How much do you think your family has influenced your ideas about sex and sexually transmitted infections like Chlamydia?