



# Chlamydia and Young People

## **The rising rates of Chlamydia**

In Australia and around the world, Chlamydia infection has been on the rise for several years. Chlamydia rates in Australia have been going steadily up by about 20% per year since 1998, when proper national statistics started being collected. We only know about the cases of Chlamydia that get diagnosed when people go to a doctor or a sexual health clinic and get tested. There are possibly hundreds, or thousands, of people with Chlamydia infection who have never been tested – if these were also discovered then the numbers would be even higher. The latest figures tell us that in 2006 there were over 40,000 cases of Chlamydia infection notified to health departments around Australia.

## **Young people and Chlamydia**

Of those 40,000 or so Chlamydia infections notified in Australia in 2006, over 15,000 were young people aged 20 – 24 years and over 9,000 were young people aged 15 – 19 years. These 2 age groups have had the highest numbers of Chlamydia notifications every year. There have been more notifications of females with Chlamydia infection compared to males every year as well. This could partly be explained by the fact that young women are more likely to get tested because they are visiting a doctor for other reasons, such as contraception or Pap smears.

### **Do you love numbers?**

If so, you can find out more about Chlamydia statistics at:  
[http://www9.health.gov.au/cda/Source/Rpt\\_5.cfm](http://www9.health.gov.au/cda/Source/Rpt_5.cfm)

Why are young people more likely to get a Chlamydia infection? One reason is that, for young women at least, their bodies are physically more susceptible. A young woman's cervix is microscopically different from an older woman's cervix. The cells of a young woman's cervix are easier for the Chlamydia bacteria to penetrate and multiply. Another reason is that young people could be changing partners more frequently. Young people might have more partners because they haven't decided on a long term relationship with one person. These differences between younger and older people aren't true for everyone, but in general they are.

Research shows that young people who are same sex attracted are also more likely to get sexually transmitted infections, including Chlamydia. The reasons for this are thought to be due to number and change of partners. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are also at higher risk for Chlamydia infection and some other sexually transmitted infections. The main reason is because they have less access to health care than non-Aboriginal people in Australia, so their overall health is poorer.

Using condoms is therefore extremely important for most sexually active young people. Even if young people use condoms most of the time the number of partners multiplied by the number of occasions of unprotected sex equals a higher chance of getting or transmitting Chlamydia.