

Warning on STIs: Australian report

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There has been an alarming jump in some STI infections, with rates of Chlamydia up 17 percent and gonorrhoea rising 25 percent, new national surveillance figures show.

Researchers say there's a need for more awareness and intervention, particularly in Indigenous communities, to reduce the infection rates.

The annual *HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections in Australia Annual Surveillance Report* was released at the Australasian HIV/AIDS Conference alongside two other national reports: the *Bloodborne viral and sexually transmitted infections in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: Surveillance and Evaluation Report 2011*; and the *Annual Report of Trends in Behaviour 2011*.

Compiled each year by UNSW's Kirby Institute and the National Centre in HIV Social Research, also at UNSW, the reports show that the number of new cases of HIV has remained stable for the past five years, with 1,043 new diagnoses last year. The rate of diagnosis has modestly declined in NSW and Victoria and risen in Queensland and Western Australia.

"Importantly, overall rates of HIV remain low compared to other countries due to ongoing prevention strategies," said UNSW Associate Professor David Wilson, head of the Surveillance and Evaluation Program for Public Health at the Kirby Institute.

However, rates of other STIs had risen dramatically, Dr Wilson said.

More than 10,000 people were diagnosed with gonorrhoea in 2010, a jump of 25 percent over 2009 levels, while [Chlamydia](#) was the most frequently reported notifiable condition in Australia, with 74,305 cases diagnosed – a 17 percent increase over the previous year.

Young heterosexual people had most chlamydia infections while the increase in gonorrhoea has occurred predominantly among men who have sex with men.

“Increases in the rate of these sexually transmissible infections are of concern and imply the need for renewed and targeted prevention efforts along with coordinated surveillance and monitoring,” Dr Wilson said.

Indigenous communities continued to experience STI infection rates higher than the general community. Chlamydia and gonorrhoea diagnosis rates in the Indigenous population in 2010 were many times higher, equating to 36 percent of all cases of [gonorrhoea](#) and nine percent of all Chlamydia cases notified in Australia.

The exception was infectious syphilis rates, which remained stable in 2010, with 130 cases notified among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, mostly in remote communities.

"This gives hope to the aspiration of eliminating infectious syphilis from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities,” said James Ward, head of the Kirby Institute’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Program.

A report into social and behavioural trends by UNSW’s National Centre in HIV Social Research confirmed that stigma remained a major issue for people affected by HIV, hepatitis C or drug dependence.

In HIV prevention, survey research indicated that the proportion of gay

men engaging in unprotected sex with casual partners had increased over time to 38 percent of men with casual partners in 2010.

“These are often isolated or occasional incidents of unprotected sex, and may occur in situations where both partners believe they have the same HIV status,” said NCHSR Senior Research Fellow, Dr Martin Holt.

Provided by University of New South Wales

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