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AVOID SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS (STIs) – USE PROTECTION AND PRACTISE SAFE SEX OVER HOLIDAY SEASON

The AMA is warning that one thing that you don’t want to give – or receive – at Christmas is a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today that STIs are on the rise and people should be vigilant this holiday season about practising safe sex.

“STI rates in Australia have increased significantly in recent years,” Dr Bartone said.

“From 2013 to 2017, new cases of gonorrhoea increased by 80 per cent, and chlamydia increased by 13 per cent between 2015 and 2017.

“Young Australians – those between 20 and 30 – are the most likely to become infected with an STI.”

The AMA *Position Statement on Sexual and Reproductive Health* notes that other vulnerable populations include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; gay, lesbian and bisexual people; intersex, transgender and gender diverse people; people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; and older Australians.

Although the most common STIs – chlamydia and gonorrhoea – can be treated with antibiotics, they can cause serious problems if left untreated.

Both these STIs can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease in women, which can result in ectopic pregnancies and infertility. Gonorrhoea infection can even spread to the joints and heart valves if not treated.

Research has shown that Australians tend to have more sexual partners in the summer season, and more people are diagnosed with STIs during this time.

Higher rates of travel during summer, as well as significant increases in drug and alcohol use, can mean that safe sexual practices are cast aside.

Although it can’t provide 100 per cent protection, consistent condom use significantly lowers the risk of contracting most STIs, including gonorrhoea, syphilis, chlamydia, and genital herpes. Dams are also important for protection – including for sex between women.

“Worrying about contracting an STI is a great way to ruin an otherwise enjoyable sexual experience,” Dr Bartone said.

“Making sure you are careful and use protection can make sex safer and more enjoyable for everyone.”

The AMA *Position Statement on Sexual and Reproductive Health* is at:
<https://ama.com.au/position-statement/sexual-and-reproductive-health-2014>

AMA Advice for Avoiding STIs

- Use protection – use a new, lubricated condom every time. Check the use-by date and avoid tearing the condom when opening. Using water-based lubricant lowers the chance of condom breakages.
- Don't assume that a partner does not have an STI because they don't have symptoms – in many instances, STIs are asymptomatic.
- Have frank and upfront conversations with partners about their STI history.
- If you're having casual sex, get tested for STIs regularly by visiting your GP or local sexual health clinic.
- Avoid combining sex with alcohol and drug use.

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