

# Sexuality



The Action centre and Ansell support safe sex **Ansell**

## DID YOU KNOW?

That two thirds of all the people who contract Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) are under the age of 25.

52% of Australians rely on condoms as their main form of contraception.



Pregnant Midge, Barbie's friend, pictured above, was pulled from the shelves of Wal-mart in the US because some parents thought it was too real.

Nearly half of sexually-active high school students do not regularly use condoms.

Half of all teenage pregnancies occur in the first six months of sexual activity.

The condom is an Italian invention. It was invented by the anatomist Gabriel Fallopio, to avoid contracting the disease syphilis.

Teenagers in Australia are the most frequent users of emergency contraception at family planning clinics.

Fifty per cent of 12 students and 20 per cent of year 11 students are sexually active.

Young aboriginal girls are over-represented among the Australian teenagers giving birth.

## BUZZ WORDS

**ANATOMIST:** a scientist who specialises in the structure of the body of a human being.

**CELIBACY:** a vow to not have sexual intercourse or enter into marriage.

**CONTRACEPTION:** birth control, the prevention of conception by deliberate methods.

**EVOLUTION:** a process in which something passes by degrees to a different stage (especially a more advanced or mature stage)  
Example: the evolution of Greek civilization

**STDs:** Sexually Transmitted Diseases

**SEXUALITY:** your sexual character.

**MEDIEVAL:** of, or pertaining to, the middle ages.

**OECD:** There are 30 member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. They share a commitment to democratic government and the market economy.

## FACT BOX

**1** THE average age of onset of sexual activity has been declining over the last 50 years, it is currently 16 years of age.

**2** DESPITE evidence of responsibility among young people, approximately 15% of teenagers used no contraception at their most recent sexual encounter.



**3** CHLAMYDIA, a cause of infertility in young women, is the most common STD in Australia. Of those infected, the highest percentage are women aged 15 to 24.

# Sex: it matters

SARAH WALLACE

BEING comfortable with our bodies and our sexuality is an extremely important factor in our overall health and happiness. It is the centre of our being and it will be on our minds, a great deal of time, for the rest of our lives.

There's a wealth of information out there to help you to maintain your sexual health and happiness. From learning where to go for sexual health care advice, to being able to understand your own sexuality in a positive way.

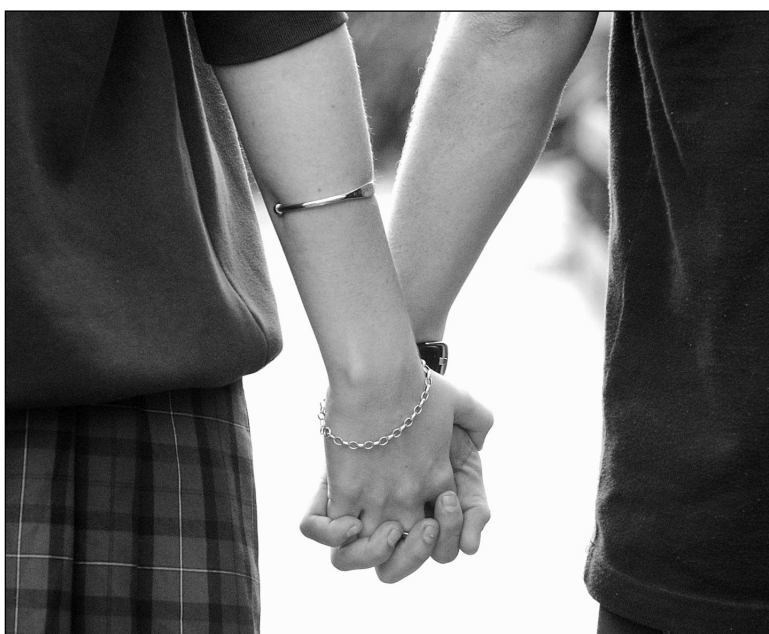
### SHOCKING STATISTICS

Understanding your sexuality and sexual health is worth taking the time to explore. A recent adolescent study on sexual activity revealed that the rates of teen pregnancies and abortions in Australia are among the highest in the world.

The report, released on August 4 2003, shows Australia has the sixth-highest teenage pregnancy rate and the third-highest abortion rate among Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.

The reports author, Dr Rachel Skinner, of the School of Paediatrics and Child Health at the University of Western Australia, said existing strategies to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases were lacking.

The reports also showed that teenagers were the most frequent users of emergency contraception at Australian Family Planning clinics, while nearly half of all sexually active Australian high school students did not use condoms consistently. This might come as a shock to teenagers who are in the process of exploring their own sexuality.



### WHERE TO GO FOR ADVICE

Perhaps a reluctance to approach doctors for prescription contraception after becoming sexually active could be a telling link to the teen pregnancy rates.

Half of adolescent pregnancies occurred in the first six months of becoming sexually active and abortion was the second most common reason for young women aged 12 to 24 to be admitted to Australian hospitals in 1997/98.

Details of centres where you can go for sexual health advice are included in the 'who to contact' box on page 13.

### INDIGENOUS AT RISK

According to the reports, statistics on indigenous birth rates cite that indigenous people have a much higher rate of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

**Abortion was the second most common reason for young women aged 12 to 24 to be admitted to Australian hospitals in 1997/98.**

have already been infected. Indigenous teenagers were at particular risk.

### SEX EDUCATION

The report concludes in recommending a review of sex education in schools, and called for better access to health services for teenagers.

"As health-care providers we have the opportunity to draw from the experience of other nations to create a model of adolescent sexual health promotion," Dr Skinner said.

### THE CONDOMS IN SCHOOLS DEBATE

Recently a prominent Melbourne doctor was reported as calling for the State Government to make condoms available in high schools.

The Royal Children's Hospital for Adolescent Health director Susan Sawyer says condom vending machines in schools should be seen as one part of sex education and health promotion as a whole, an issue that was still being glossed over by schools and governments.

"Large numbers of young people are currently missing out on adequate sexuality education, despite the evidence about the extent of sexual health risks. Health education, including sexual health, is essential learning and should not be left to chance."

An American study on condom vending machines in schools showed students were less likely to become sexually active if condoms were available and students who were already active were more likely to use protection.

"Young people are unlikely to thank us for our current attitudes and policies. Our uncomfortable silence or outright objection to appropriate sexuality education in schools is affecting their health," she concluded.

## We've come a long way, baby



**SEX AND THE CITY:** Nowadays talking about sex and masturbation is the norm on television programs like this American show, *Sex And The City*.

### SEXUAL EVOLUTION

THE Western world has come a long, long way in understanding sexuality. According to the medieval Christian philosophy, the natural function and goal of all sexual behaviour was reproduction. Therefore masturbation and using contraception was unnatural, yet rape

was considered natural because it was an act that could end in the birth of a baby. Women were considered to be reproductive tools.

In 1878 a British feminist, Annie Besant, was convicted of obscenity for publishing a birth control manual. This seems ludicrous by today's standards

### MASTURBATION

In a 1934 edition of The Boy Scout Handbook, the topic of masturbation was broached. Any "habit" that causes a boy to lose "vital fluid" tends to weaken him and makes him less of a man and less resistant to disease.

We can laugh at this but it's proof that times really have changed and for the better.

### WHAT'S COOKIN' NOW?

Nowadays, masturbation in privacy is perfectly acceptable and yet the act of rape is punishable by law. Television shows such as *Sex And The City* (picture left) has made talking about sex not only acceptable but a healthy way to deal with emotions.

### HOMOSEXUALITY

The Western world has also come a long way in understanding homosexuality and bisexuality but some would argue there is still a long way to go.

In 1975 it was illegal to engage in a homosexual act. In 1976 these laws were finally abolished allowing everyone's sexuality to be recognised.

\*Look out for the upcoming edition of *Spress Issues*, on homosexuality.



**SPARE CHANGE:** In China condom vending machines were made available in hotels, drug stores and other shops.

But do they have a place in schools? It's unlikely they would be introduced to Victorian schools by the current State Government. They would probably be made available through health staff, not via a vending machine.