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NORTH COAST**
education research workforce

MEDIA RELEASE

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Over-confidence about condom skills puts festival goers at risk

A milestone survey* of young people attending a NSW music festival has found that while most of those interviewed felt confident about their condom usage, a significant number had used condoms inconsistently or incorrectly, resulting in high annual rates of condom failures during intercourse.

While 77 per cent of those interviewed said they were confident with their condom practices, 37 per cent had experienced condom breakage in the past year, 48 per cent had seen a condom slip off during intercourse, and 51 per cent when withdrawing the penis after sex.

This poses significant risks of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), specifically chlamydia and HIV, and unwanted pregnancies, and highlights the need for health promotion campaigns targeting this cohort, according to researchers from the University Centre for Rural Health North Coast (UCRH), Western Sydney University and the North Coast Public Health Unit.

Western Sydney University Medical students undergoing UCRH clinical placements, in collaboration with the North Coast HIV & Related Programs (HARP) and the North Coast Positive Adolescent Sexual Health Consortium (PASH), interviewed 290 music festival attendees, male and female, aged 18-29 years.

An 11-question survey was conducted in private at the festival site. It asked for participants' own assessment of their confidence and ability to use condoms consistently and correctly, and how often they did so.

According to Franklin John-Leader, Co-Chair of PASH the survey found that only 18 per cent of respondents said they always used condoms during sex in the past 12 months.

"When asked where they had learnt about condom use, 55 per cent of participants said they had learnt through high school sex education, 27 per cent from a partner, 18 per cent from packet instructions, 17 per cent from friends or family, 7 per cent from the internet, and 5 per cent from a health-care worker," Mr John-Leader said.

"Around 34 per cent of interviewees reported consuming at least ten drinks in the past 24 hours. Not surprisingly, this group was more than twice as likely to feel confident about their ability to use condoms correctly."

Some 94 per cent had been under the influence of drugs or alcohol during sex some time in the last year, while 19 per cent reported being under the influence "most of the time" or "always" when they had sex, according to UCRH researcher Dr Sabrina Pit.

"To our knowledge this is the first study to demonstrate that young Australian festival attendees, as an identified risk group, may be experiencing a significantly higher rate of problems when using condoms."

Dr Pit added, “Despite reasonable levels of confidence in their ability to use condoms, inconsistent use and a high rate of condom failure put this population at an increased risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, specifically chlamydia.

“This study has implications for sexual health promotion and public health programs, and targeting future interventions toward this group may be of value. There is a need to empower young Australians, particularly females, with knowledge and confidence in order to improve condom use.”

UCRH Director, Professor Ross Bailie said, “This is important research with apparent implications for the health of a significant number of young Australians. It not only has national relevance but is particularly timely for the North Coast as we move into schoolies celebrations and the various music festivals over the holiday season.”

** Errors and Predictors of Confidence in Condom Use amongst Young Australians Attending a Music Festival* - Karina M Hall, Daniel G. Brieger, Sukhita H. De Silva, Benjamin F. Pfister, Daniel J. Youlden, Franklin John-Leader, **Sabrina W. Pit** - Errors and Predictors of Confidence in Condom Use amongst Young Australians Attending a Music Festival. *Journal of Sexually Transmitted Diseases*. Volume 2016 (2016). Free download: <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/jstd/2016/6054870/>

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