

Students need better access to sexual health resources

5 July 2016

A national youth health study indicates that youth are delaying sexual activity until they are older; however those who are sexually active are less prepared and less likely to access sexual health services.

Data from over 27,000 New Zealand [high school students](#) in the Youth2000 survey series conducted in 2001, 2007 and 2012 investigated changes in the sexual health behaviours of New Zealand secondary school [students](#), by the Adolescent Health Research Group from the University of Auckland.

Study leader, Dr Terryann Clark, says students in 2012 were more likely to delay [sexual activity](#), but those who were sexually active, were less likely to use condoms and contraception consistently, compared to students in 2001.

"Declining contraceptive use over an 11-year period suggests that current strategies are inadequate, particularly for Māori, Pacific and socioeconomically deprived students," she says. "Appropriate and accessible sexual and reproductive health services and comprehensive sexuality education are urgently required."

The study into trends in students' self-reported sexual and reproductive health behaviours was published this week in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, led by Dr Terryann Clark from the University of Auckland's School of Nursing.

The study results revealed Māori, Pacific and socioeconomically deprived students were less likely to use condoms and have access to contraception than New Zealand European students and students from wealthier neighbourhoods.

"Current strategies are not working to improve access to contraception for young people,

especially among our poorer communities" says Dr Clark. "There are also significant cultural and access issues for Māori and Pasifika [youth](#)."

"Youth development literature suggests that one of the best ways to reduce teen pregnancy is by making sure that young people are engaged in school and have goals and aims for the future," says Dr Clark.

"In that case they are far less likely to get pregnant, so strategies that address youth sexual health must take into account the big picture - education, employment and aspirations," she says.

Another important strategy was ensuring that youth have access to free, non-judgemental and culturally responsive sexual health care and information.

"Sexual health is still shrouded in secrecy, shame and embarrassment." Health professionals, educators and families do not address sexual health issues with youth well.

"Society still finds youth sexual behaviour difficult to talk about, and therefore resources and support are limited." A comprehensive approach to [sexual health](#) is required if we want healthy [young people](#) who feel valued and contribute well to society," she says.

Provided by University of Auckland

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