

## Media Release

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### IF IT'S NOT ON, IT'S NOT ON THIS NATIONAL YOUTH WEEK

Young people attending the many events being held during National Youth Week (5 – 13 April) will be provided with free condoms in an effort to promote the importance of practicing safe sex and avoiding sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unplanned pregnancy.

The initiative by Australia's leading sexual and reproductive healthcare organisation, Marie Stopes International, comes as research shows the rate of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in Australia is at an all time high yet condom usage is low.

"Youth have a number of misunderstandings about the basics of contraception, as well as a lack of knowledge on STIs, so it is vital that we use every opportunity to promote the safer sex message," said Jill Michelson, Operations Manager of Marie Stopes International.

National Youth Week will take place this year from 5-13 April and is Australia's largest celebration of young people.

The Marie Stopes International Youth Squad will be distributing condoms at a number of National Youth Week events around Australia, including the popular Moonee Valley Youth Week Festival and The Burbs Western Sydney Youth Festival.

A recent study published last year analysed sexual-risk behaviour, self-perceived risk and knowledge of STIs among young Australians aged 16 to 29 years attending music festivals.[1]

Findings indicated that 80% of attendees had experienced vaginal or anal sex. 48% had multiple partners in the previous year and 66% had a new partner in the past 3 months.

"What is frightening is that 39% did not use condoms all or most of the time, therefore placing themselves at risk of an STI," Ms Michelson said.

"Also of concern is that only 24% of those classified as being at risk of an STI perceived their health as actually being at risk."

Chlamydia was the most frequently reported notifiable condition in Australia in 2007 with over 50,000. In comparison, there were only 16,967 notifications of Chlamydia in 2000 – indicating that the rate of diagnosis has more than tripled over the past seven years.

"Often STIs such as Chlamydia don't have any symptoms, so can be contracted and passed on unknowingly," Ms Michelson said.

"The only way to make sure you don't have Chlamydia is to have an STI check-up, and the only way to avoid it is to use a condom.

"So during National Youth Week, make sure you stick to the motto 'if it's not on, it's not on' when it comes to sex and condoms."

(ends)

**About Marie Stopes International:** Marie Stopes International is a not-for-profit sexual and reproductive healthcare provider, with centres in the ACT, Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia. The organisation offers a range of services, including abortion, vasectomy, sexually transmitted infection check-ups and contraception. Surplus proceeds from Australian activities support the work of the Marie Stopes International Partnership, which delivers sexual and reproductive health services to over four million people in 38 countries worldwide.

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[1]Sexual-risk behaviour, self-perceived risk and knowledge of sexually transmissible infections among young Australians attending a music festival, Megan S. C. Lim, Margaret E. Hellard, Campbell K. Aitken and Jane S. Hocking, Published 26 February 2007