

National Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health



Executive Summary

The 6th National Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health was conducted in 2018 by La Trobe University and involved 6,327 students in Years 10, 11, and 12 across Government, Catholic and Independent schools within every Australian state and territory.

KEY PRIORITY AREAS FOR ACTION

The survey was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health, with the aims to provide information on the progress in the key priority areas for action in the 'Five National Blood Borne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategies 2018-2022'. The priority areas include:

Improving knowledge about the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), sexually transmissible infections (STIs) and blood-borne viruses (BBVs)

Monitoring behaviours that impact on BBVs and STIs

Educational initiatives to improve knowledge and minimise behaviours that increase the risk of infection

The survey contains extensive data related to the three priority areas. While data is not broken down according to state or territory, the data highlights differences in responses between female, male and trans and gender diverse participants.

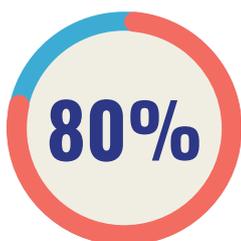
The survey includes questions in the form of correct and incorrect responses (knowledge questions), as well as experiential questions relating to sexual behaviour.

Source: Fisher, C. M., Waling, A., Kerr, L., Bellamy, R., Ezer, P., Mikolajczak, G., Brown, G., Carman, M. & Lucke, J. 2019. 6th National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health 2018, (ARCSHS Monograph Series No. 113), Bundoora: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, La Trobe University.

KNOWLEDGE

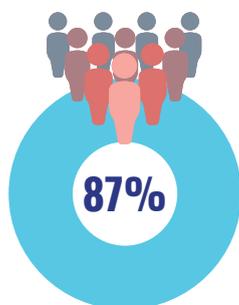
Across all knowledge questions in the survey, students answered an average of 56% correctly, with relatively low rates of perceived risk, testing and vaccination. Key points include:

High levels of knowledge around HIV transmission



- Students on average answered 80% of questions correctly. Although there was a good level of knowledge about HIV transmission, most students believed they were at low or no risk of HIV infection (93.3%). Moreover, 89.6% of respondents had not been tested for HIV

- Regarding STI knowledge questions, students scored 63% and 71% on all STI transmission questions. Many students (87.4%) did not believe they were likely to get an STI



- Viral hepatitis knowledge was generally poor with an average of 31% correct responses to these questions
- In terms of the HPV knowledge questions, students scored an average of 38% correct, though 62.5% had heard of HPV. Only 38.7% believed they had been vaccinated against HPV with 38.8% being unsure about this

ONLINE BEHAVIOURS

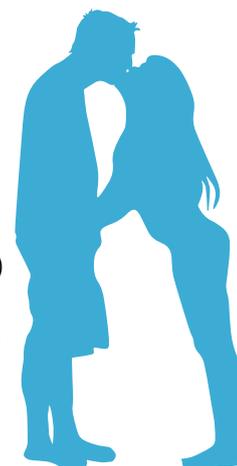
The survey asked about 'sexting' and cyberbullying behaviours and experiences. The main points include:

- One third (33%) of students reported 'sexting' in the last two months mostly with a girlfriend, boyfriend or friend
- Very few students (7%) reported experiences of cyberbullying
- Most students reported being active and frequent users of social media including Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat and Instagram

BEHAVIOURS

These questions sought to better understand young people's sexual and related behaviours to better support educational and prevention strategies and efforts. The main points include:

- 68.2% of students believed their peers were using condoms. This was higher than the actual number who reported using condoms in the last year (62.2%)
- A high number of students reported having engaged in some form of sexual activity, including 74.4% of students participating in deep kissing and 46.6% having had sexual intercourse
- Sexually active students (46.6%) were largely having sex in their homes (75.8%) with a boyfriend or girlfriend. Most reported discussing having sex (81.2%) and protecting their sexual health (76.9%)
- Students not yet sexually active (46.6%) did not feel regretful about their decision to not have sex



EDUCATION

Students responded to questions in the survey about informal and formal educational experiences.

- 78.7% had accessed the internet to find answers to sexual health questions – this was infrequent, however. 85.5% indicated once a month or less
- 71% of students felt most confident talking about sexual health with female friends and trusted them to provide accurate information. 52.7% indicated high levels of trust
- The most trusted source of sexual health information were GPs (88.6%) followed by mothers (59.8%) and community health services (54.7%)
- Students felt most confident that they could talk about STIs, contraception and sex with female friends (71%) and male friends (52%) and GPs (48%)
- School programs, nurses, counsellors and teachers received low to moderate ratings of students' confidence in talking to them or seeking out information