

# Understanding contemporary patterns of condom use among young people in Australia

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## Background:

Promoting condom use has long been the central focus of STI prevention. However, recent research shows that most young people do not use condoms regularly or consistently. Given high rates of common STIs, and an increasing emphasis on biomedicine (rather than condoms) for HIV prevention, it is timely to look at factors associated with young people's use of condoms. In this paper we look at predictors of condom use, with a focus on demographic, social and relational variables.

## Methods:

Data were collected in the 2021 National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health, which included n=6481 young people (14-18 years). Measures included standard demographic questions, postcode, whether young people were sexually active, frequency/regularity of condom use, condom use at last sex, attitudes to condoms and confidence communicating about condom use or STI prevention with partners, friends and family. Multiple regression was used to identify predictors of condom use.

## Results:

Most young people reported positive attitudes toward condoms and felt that young people should be using condoms (93.3%). However, around half did not believe young people commonly used condoms with new partners (55.3%) and less than half (48.6%) had used a condom when they last had sex. More frequent condom use was associated with greater confidence in communication about sex and a sense that condoms are a common part of young people's sexual cultures. However, young people tended to use condoms for contraception rather than STI prevention.

## Conclusion:

In the 1980s- 90s, HIV introduced an urgency to condom promotion. Today, young people may be less likely to view condom use as important, necessary or common. This may be a barrier for young people introducing or insisting on condom use with sexual partners. There is a need for new research on condoms in contemporary sexual cultures among Australian young people.

## Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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