

# Internet in back seat in sex study

By Eva Tejszerski

TO FIND out information about condoms, the pill, sexually transmitted diseases and teenage pregnancy, sometimes it is easier to simply type it into Google.

But, as embarrassed as some people might feel about discussing sexual health, a recent national survey has revealed fewer young people trust the internet as a reliable source of information.

While used more widely than other sources including parents, partners, school and friends, it showed the online arena has taken a back seat when it comes to young people depending on facts about sex, puberty, contraception and relationships.

Coinciding with International Youth Day last month, the research was done by Family Planning NSW and social interaction website, MySpace.

More than 1000 people aged 12 to 24 in Australia were surveyed, with about 75 per cent being female.

Results revealed friends were the most common avenue of information about sexual activity, followed by partners and the internet.

Parents were more likely to be used for advice about relationships, and doctors were the most trusted source for information relating to sex.



**Let's talk about sex:** Peer support mentors (from top left) Kat Morrison, 20, Jacqui Goodwin, 20, Lexi Compitello, 19, Matthew Smith, 19, and Justin Seputra, 16, help engage youth about sexual health.

Picture: Jane Dyson

Respondents also said they would like to know more about how to cope with being a young parent, the risks of drinking alcohol and taking drugs, sexual pleasure, and the availability of confidential clinical services.

Organisations including UpZone Youth Health Cen-

trepreneurial assistance by training young people to be youth health peer educators.

As part of St George Youth Services, it has received state funding to co-ordinate a project called "Keep It Safe", which focuses on getting youth leaders to inter-

act with their peers about sex education.

Youth health project officer Jess Santos said while the internet was a valuable tool, face-to-face communication was crucial.

"The internet has a lot to offer in terms of increasing general knowledge, [but] there

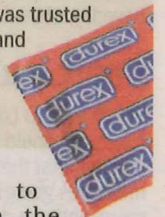
is still a strong place in society for consultation, engagement and discussion," she said.

Matthew Smith, one of the youth health peer educators, said that there was a danger of information overload on the internet.

"There is so much replication on the web; it's better to

## FACTS OF LIFE

- Half the respondents said they got information about sexual activities and puberty through friends
- 48 per cent said they would see a doctor first about information regarding contraception and sexual health
- 20 per cent said they got their information about sexual health through school
- The internet was trusted by 21 per cent and the media by 16 per cent of respondents.



actually talk to someone on the same level as you," he said.

"There is also a greater risk of cyber-bullying on sites like Facebook, even though I'd be more likely to talk about relationships than things like STDs with my friends."

Fellow mentor, Jacqui Goodwin, said most youths preferred the anonymity of the internet.

"It's good to see young people aren't scared to go [to the doctor]," Ms Goodwin said.

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