

More children diagnosed with sex infections

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Almost 200 children are being diagnosed with sexually transmitted diseases every month, raising fears about a generation of promiscuous young people who are failing to heed advice on safe sex.

Ministers pledged in 2004 to spend £50 million on sexual health education, much of it focused on young people. However, the rate of infection has remained steady and was revealed in figures for diagnoses on the under-16s in England. They were placed in the Commons Library this week after a question from Norman Lamb, the Liberal Democrat health spokesman, and show that from 2002 to 2006, 11,256 under-16s were diagnosed with gonorrhoea, chlamydia, syphilis, herpes and genital warts.

In 2006, there were 2,282 diagnoses of sexually transmitted infections, a slight rise from 2,148 in 2002.

Chlamydia cases have risen from 1,115 a year to 1,327. Over the past five years, a total of 6,495 children have been diagnosed with the disease, which can cause infertility in later life. It has no symptoms in either men or women, so often remains undetected.

Genital warts are up from 552 to 621, with 2,845 cases. Cases of gonorrhoea among children have fallen, from 338 to 190, with a total of 1,196 diagnoses.

Last month, The Daily Telegraph reported figures showing that the number of adults diagnosed with sexually transmitted diseases had risen by a quarter in just five years. The Department of Health admits that rates of most sexually transmitted infections have increased in recent years.

It said the rate of infection could be attributed to factors including increased levels of testing and screening, improved sensitivity of diagnostic tests and changes in sexual behaviour.

In November 2006, the Government launched the "Condom Essential Wear" campaign, which it says is targeted at the hardest to reach young people who are at most risk of contracting an STI. Approximately £7.3 million was spent on the campaign in 2006/07, on a combination of TV, cinema, radio, press and digital advertising and the creation of two websites.