A team of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, health workers and university researchers hung around places like Flinders Mall, hostels and parks. We spoke to 45 young women and men about what they thought about sexually transmitted infections and blood borne viruses (STI/BBV) like Chlamydia, Trichomoniasis, HIV and Hepatitis C. Young Indigenous people in Townsville talked to us about why it is important to look after your health and protect yourself from STI/BBV; this is what we learnt from them.

Young people who had been diagnosed with infections learnt important lessons from these experiences. Now they took better precautions to protect themselves, and wanted other young people to learn from them.

Now I have had it I can see that guy could have anything, like AIDS. You can get treatment for some stuff but some you can’t. (Lindy, 17)

I learned the hard way, now it is my turn to tell these young people not to be shy to get help. (Samantha)

Young people worried about what would happen to their families if they caught something, so they try to use condoms, have regular STI/BBV checks and talk openly with their sex partners.

I would not hesitate to get help from the doctors, not for my sake but for her sake. It is for me too but I’d like to keep an eye out for my girl and my baby. (Matthew, 23)

Young people felt good taking care of their health by protecting themselves from STI/BBV.

I like to look out for myself, my safety, my health. I like to know that I’m safe from STI. (Jade, 21)

This project has shown how young people and researchers can work together to do a research project. We found that Indigenous young people in Townsville value their health and prevent STI/BBV because they are looking after their families and communities. Their past experiences made them stronger. Families, communities and health services can provide information and support so young people can better protect themselves against STI/BBV.

Remember

Many STIs have no symptoms. Carry condoms and use them. Have regular sexual health checks. If you’re worried, see a doctor or health worker.

The Indigenous Resiliency Project is a partnership between the Townsville Aboriginal and Islanders Health Service (TAIHS) and the National Centre for HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research. Get the full research report from TAIHS at 57-59 Gordon St, Garbutt, QLD 4814 (07 4759 4000) or check it out online at www.nchecr.unsw.edu.au.

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