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 talked to us about how they protect themselves against STI/BBV; this is what we learnt from them.

Young people said that using a condom is the best way to prevent transmission of STI/BBV.

Condoms! Best for keeping me safe. (Eric, 26)

If you want to sex someone ask to use protection. If they say no, don’t have sex. (Ester, 26)

People got free condoms from TAIHS, Townsville Sexual Health Unit, school and friends. They carried condoms with them because sex wasn’t always planned.

I know if you don’t use protection you are in trouble. That is why I have started to carry condoms with me. You never know, aye. (Tim, 18)

Young people went for STI/BBV checks regularly or if they were worried they might have an infection. They used Indigenous health services and the staff made them feel comfortable and respected.

Every time I go to TAIHS I go for a sexual health checkup. I make sure that everything is clear. (Rachel, 23)

It feels good having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers, makes me feel very comfortable. They understand me and I can understand them. (Morris, 20)

Young people took time getting to know new partners and build trusting and committed relationships. They talked with their sex partners about preventing STI/BBV, even when they felt shame.

I don’t rush into anything, I never rush. It is important not to rush, rather know a girl first. (Finn, 18)

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.

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 transmission by using condoms, building trusting relationships, talking with sex partners and having regular STI/BBV checks. Families, communities and health services can provide information and support so young people can better protect themselves against STI/BBV.

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.nchec.unsw.edu.au.