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*****MEDIA RELEASE*****

Infertility Rates Skyrocket With Dramatic Rise in STDS

Australia's Fertility Crisis: Will Chlamydia Render Our Youth Infertile?

One of Australia's leading minds in fertility and reproductive medicine is warning a chlamydia epidemic sweeping the nation will cause long-term effects on the fertility of future generations.

Australia's most common sexually transmissible infection, chlamydia, is increasing at an alarming rate and will lead to a **dramatic increase in infertility** in years to come.

Monash IVF Senior Fertility Specialist, Dr Kee Ong says the rate of chlamydia notifications has **more than tripled** in the last decade with a fifty percent increase for females.

Nearly 80,000 infections were reported in 2011, up from 17,000 in 2001. The rate of increase is five-fold for females and four-fold for males aged 15-19 years.

"Young people aged 15-29 years account for over 80 percent of cases and our **schools and universities** have become a **breeding ground for chlamydia**," Dr Ong said.

"It is crucial to increase awareness about the disease, but what we really need to focus in on and educate our youth about is that **chlamydia can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease** or PID, and that's where things get serious."

PID is an infection of the female reproductive organs including the uterus, ovaries and fallopian tubes and must now be counted as **the most important sexually transmitted disease for women, excepting only AIDS**.

"Chlamydia is responsible for **50 percent of PID cases** and while treatment for chlamydia is quite simple, PID has much more **long-term and devastating consequences for our youth**," Dr Ong said.

Dr Ong has labeled PID as **the nation's least-talked about, silent epidemic** causing chronic pain, increased risk of ectopic pregnancy and perhaps the most devastating of all, infertility.

"10,000 women are treated for PID in our hospitals Australia wide and as many as 30,000 more are treated as outpatients," Dr Ong said.

Just one episode of PID **doubles the risk of tubal disease** and **increases the risk of ectopic pregnancy** seven fold.

The risk of complete tubal blockage increases to a concerning **75 percent** after 3 episodes of PID.

"The ability to surgically repair tubal damage is very poor and the difficult IVF journey will be **the only option** for these young women down the track."

"More women are waiting until they're older to have their first child and we are increasingly finding

undiagnosed chlamydia is behind the need for IVF,” Dr Ong said.

Men are also affected and can experience inflammation of the testicles and infertility.

Dr Ong is urging a preventative approach to PID by tackling the rampant spread of chlamydia highlighting the importance of regular checks and immediate treatment.

“The safe sex message is increasingly falling on deaf ears and we need to act now to avoid **a potential fertility crisis in Australia**,” Dr Ong said.

Dr Ong is throwing his weight behind the nationwide push for a new law to be introduced allowing doctors to prescribe antibiotics to sexual partners of people diagnosed with chlamydia, even if they do not physically examine these patients.

In a Medical Journal of Australia article (published September 16, 2013), specialists say we are failing to alert and treat sexual partners as part of the standard treatment of chlamydia.

Dr Ong believes “patient-delivered partner therapy” (PDPT) in which diagnosed patients are given extra antibiotic prescriptions and information sheets for partners may be part of the solution.

“We have no effective control strategy in place to combat **a major health crisis**. PDPT is legal in 33 US states however, here in Australia, the Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction that has amended legislation to allow for it,” Dr Ong said.

“Chlamydia can have **no symptoms** and men in particular are falling through the screening cracks. Young people may not know they have it and are certainly not thinking about the potential impact it will have on their future fertility.”

Dr Ong is urging Queensland and the rest of Australia to step in line with the Northern Territory and believes a multi-faceted approach is key; educating young people and providing more screening services in convenient and accessible places.

“If you are sexually active and you have multiple partners, it’s worthwhile having a check every three to six months. If you have one partner, I would recommend a check-up every one to two years. We don’t know exactly how long you have before a chlamydia infection leads to infertility but we do know the more often you get it, the more likely you are to have problems in the future.”

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