

Advice lacking for sexually active teens

PUNGCHUMPOO PRASERT
THE NATION

OF THE 84,578 girls under age 20 who gave birth last year, 2,559 were between 10 and 14, according to Mahidol University's Centre for Health Policy and Management.

The provinces with the highest number of new mums age 15-19 were Prachuap Khiri Khan, Tak, Chon Buri, Rayong, Nakhon Nayok and Samut Sakhon, centre director Dr Wiwat Rojanapithayakorn said yesterday at a National Conference on Healthy Sexuality, which addressed ways to prevent or manage teen pregnancies.

Wiwat said premature pregnancy could affect the mother's physical and mental health and put them at risk of anaemia and premature birth or an unsafe abortion. Their babies could be underweight and develop more slowly than normal, he warned.

Premature pregnancy also often led to divorce and child abandonment, he said. With access to condoms and morning-after pills still limited in Thailand, students are increasingly having unprotected sex, Wiwat said, citing a survey by the Disease Control Department's Bureau of Epidemiology.

It found a 44-per-cent increase over the past three years in the number of female students at the "Por Wor Chor" vocational-certificate level who reported having had sex.

The rate of condom use was nearly 70 per cent among male students and 66 among females. The bureau reported an increase in sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) such as syphilis, gonorrhoea and HIV, rising to 161 cases per 100,000 population – a 72-per-cent jump from 96 in 2013, Wiwat said.

Pornpan Thongtanongsak, who runs the online "Love Care Station" advice chatroom, said that children and youths aged six to 24 had legal access to health and disease-prevention services under the Act for Prevention and Solution of the Adolescent Pregnancy Problem. They can get condoms, "emergency pills" and advice on protection from STDs and premature pregnancy, she said.