

10 QUEBEC FIRST NATIONS: SEXUAL HEALTH

Chapter 10 of the Quebec First Nations Regional Health Survey (RHS, 2008) summarizes respondents' sexual and reproductive health with consideration of age, gender and geographic zone. This is a summary of the information included in Chapter 10. Therefore it does not include all the knowledge covered by the survey, and may be open to different interpretations. To have a complete understanding of the results, the reader is invited to consult the entire chapter.

With the spread of HIV/AIDS among First Nations over the past years (First Nations account for approximately 9% of new HIV infections in Canada), there has been increased concern pertaining to public health in First Nations communities. There is also a concern about health and social problems related to unwanted pregnancies. For this reason, the survey is aimed at exploring factors related to STIs and unwanted pregnancies for First Nations youth and adults in Quebec, for the purposes of developing intervention tools and strategies to respond to these issues. Findings pertaining to sexual activity, contraceptive use, STI screenings, and reproductive health are summarized below.

Overall trends

In general, the majority of youth (12-17 years) is sexually active and is less inclined to take screening tests for STIs compared to other age groups. There is a tendency for young women to have their first child at an increasingly younger age compared to previous generations. Among adults, 80% of respondents said they were sexually active in the last year, with men more likely than women to have had more than three sexual partners over the 12 month period before the survey. Results from the survey revealed that sexual activity decreased with age as did the use of condoms. Women were more likely to have had an STI or HIV screening test.

Sexual activity

Overall, 55.9% of respondents said that they are sexually active and almost all (97.5%) of those respondents had had sexual intercourse within the 12 months before the survey. The proportion of respondents who are sexually active increases with age for both men and women. However, that proportion decreases for the 45-64 age group. After 65 years of age, men are less sexually active than their female peers.

In this study, the number of sexual partners is an indicator of high-risk sexual behaviors, and STIs in particular. On average, men declared a higher number of sexual partners than women. The proportion of respondents who said that they had had at least three sexual partners in the last 12 months before the survey was higher for men (11.8%) than for women (5.1%).

Sexual orientation

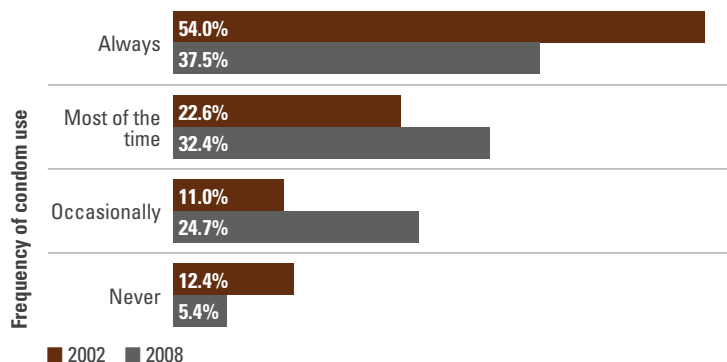
Respondents aged 18 and up were asked to specify whether they considered themselves homosexual or bisexual. The majority of respondents (95.2%) said no. However, about 2.2% consider themselves homosexual or bisexual (2.8% for women and 1.7% for men), and 2.6% answered "don't know" or "refused." Looking at the data based on age, that proportion reaches its peak among the respondents aged 18-24 (3.2%).

Use of condoms

The use of condoms is considered an essential indicator of sexual health. Single-partner individuals who had one sexual partner over the 12 months before the survey were not included in the analysis as they were perceived by the RHS as not being directly exposed to STI. For the remaining respondents who were sexually active during the 12 months prior to the study, 32.1% always used condoms, 54.1% used one "most of the time" or "occasionally" and 13.8% never used them. Slightly more women than men used condoms all the time.

Comparing the 2002 and 2008 data (Figure 1) shows that the proportion of respondents aged 12 and up with at least three sexual partners over the year before the survey said that they always used condoms for intercourse in 2002 is significantly higher than in 2008: 54% compared to 37.5%.

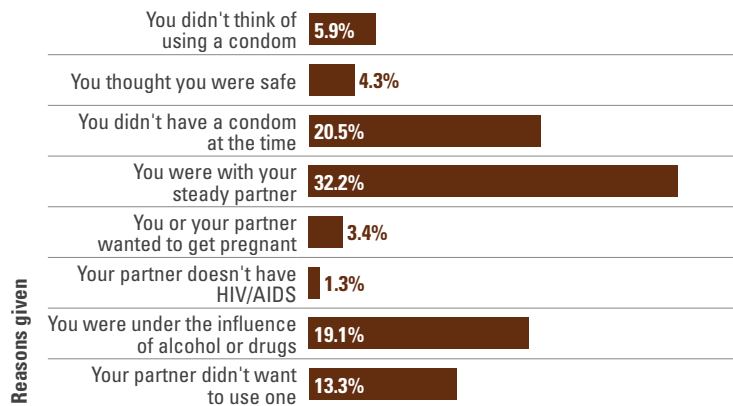
Figure 1: Frequency of condom use among respondents aged 12 and up with at least three sexual partners over the 12 months before RHS 2002 and RHS 2008



Reasons for not using condoms

For the purposes of future prevention programs, it is important to understand why respondents did not use condoms. As Figure 2 shows, the top reasons why respondents aged 12 and up with at least three sexual partners over the year before the survey did not use condoms were that they were with a steady partner (32.2%), they did not have a condom at the time (20.5%), or they were under the influence of alcohol or drugs (19.1%).

Figure 2: Reasons for which individuals aged 12 and up and with more than one partner over the 12 months before the survey did not use condoms



Screening tests

Women are more likely than men to say that they have been tested for an STI or HIV. Men are significantly more likely to say that they have never had a STI or HIV test (Table 1).

Among age groups, the highest proportion of respondents to say that they have been tested for an STI or HIV was between 25 and 44. Youth are the least likely to have had screening tests.

Table 1: Proportions of women and men aged 18 and up who say that they have been tested for HIV

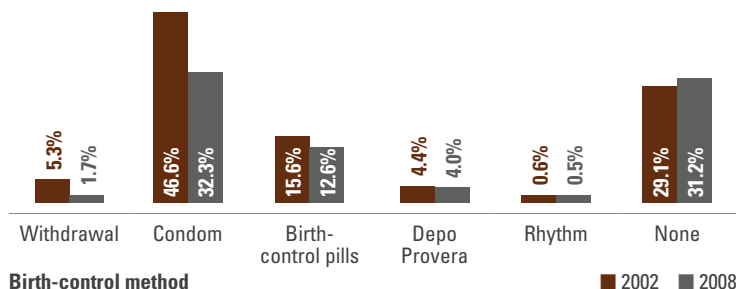
	2002		2008	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
No [†]	59.5%	73.7%	57.3%	69.9%
Yes	40.5%	26.3%	42.7%	30.1%

[†] Individuals who have never been tested

Birth-control methods

Among the most common types of birth control methods, condoms and birth control pills were the most popular. Since the 2002 study, significantly fewer individuals use the withdrawal technique as birth control.

Figure 3: Birth control methods used by sexually-active individuals aged 12 and up over the 12 months before the survey (RHS 2002 and RHS 2008)



The use of condoms and birth control pills decreases with age. 20.8% of respondents aged 18 to 24 use no birth-control methods. This trend is more evident among people aged 25 to 44 (31.9%). The highest proportion of individuals who use the withdrawal method is in the 15 to 17 (2.1%) and 25 to 44 age groups (2.6%).

The highest proportion of individuals who do not use any birth-control methods live in the geographic zone 4 (50.8%) and zone 1 communities (39.1%)¹.

Reproductive health

The average age of parents at the birth of their first child is 21.6 years old. The age at birth of first child is decreasing for younger people among women. If the age at first pregnancy tends to decrease for younger generations of women, this trend is nonexistent for men since their age of having their first child is stable from generation to generation. In a sample including participants who had their first child before 18, the average age at first birth for women age 65 and up was 17 years old, and is 14.9 years old for female counterparts aged 15 to 17 years. On average, women had their first child at slightly younger ages than men (15.9 years compared to 16.5 years).

Table 2: Average age at which the respondents aged 15 and up had their first child, based on age, RHS 2008

Age	Average age of parents at the birth of first child
65 and up	23.5 years old
45-64	23.0 years old
24-44	21.3 years old
18-24	18.5 years old
15-17	14.9 years old

Number of children

Among the respondents who answered the question, 28.4% reported having no children, 15.7% had one child, 20.2% had two, 15.1% had three and 20.6% had more than three children.

Finally, this summary provides an overview of Chapter 10 of the Quebec First Nations Regional Health Survey. For more details on the survey results, the full chapter is available at the following link: <http://www.cssspnq.com/docs/centre-de-documentation/chapitre-10-santé-sexuelle-eng.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

¹ Geographic zone

Degree of geographic isolation is based on a zone system developed by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC).

Zone 1: The community is located less than 50 km from a service centre with year round road access.

Zone 2: The community is located between 50 km and 350 km from a service centre with year-round road access.

Zone 3: The community is located over 350 km from a service centre with year-round road access.

Zone 4: The community has no year-round road access to a service centre.

Service centre: The nearest location where the community members must go in order to access service providers, banks and governmental services.



FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC AND LABRADOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMISSION