

STI swabs reveal pattern

JUDITH AISTHORPE

Data collection method will help monitor outbreaks

RESEARCHERS swabbing toilets have been able to confirm the correlation of sexually transmitted disease data and the prevalence of the disease in an area.

Menzies School of Health lead author, Associate Professor Phil Giffard said the paper compared data obtained four years ago from toilet facilities in health clinics across

the Northern Territory with the NT Centre for Disease Control's STI reports.

Assoc Prof Giffard said obtaining the data was unobtrusive to people who used the toilets.

"None of the information you get can be linked to a person and info can be obtained from people who may not be

getting diagnostically tested for STIs so it's a potential indicator for changes or new developments in diseases that are circulating," he said.

Comparing the two sets of data backed up and proved the Centre for Disease Control's data set was accurate.

The research also proved that specific STIs are more

common in certain areas.

"It shows that even if we didn't have notification data, it shows that gonorrhoea is more prevalent in Central Australia," he said.

Researchers swabbed the toilet seat, floor, flush button, taps and door handles of toilet facilities over a two-and-a-half-year period.

He said the research indicated that the swabbing method could be applied in other jurisdictions without a reporting system to monitor STIs and keep on top of outbreaks.

"It shows that there is an alternative which is to swab surfaces in public toilets," he said.

The research method was a result of a trend within the sci-

ence community to collect through places in our everyday environment.

Assoc Prof Giffard stressed that people could not catch STIs from toilets.

He also said the toilets used in the study were not dirty toilets and regular cleaning of the loos would not make STI germs disappear.

"This (study) does not reflect badly on the management of these facilities," he said.

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Gay marriage vote shame

A LABOR MP says it's shameful the Turnbull government won't allow politicians a free vote on same-sex marriage after it was legalised in Germany.

The German parliament yesterday supported the move following an about-face by Chancellor Angela Merkel, who freed members to vote on their conscience rather than follow party lines.

"Wonderful news for Germans. Shameful our PM won't let us vote for #equalmarriage #LovesLove," opposition MP Andrew Giles tweeted.

Debate was reignited in Australia this week after cabinet minister Christopher Pyne told a federal Liberal council



Andrew Giles

function the issue of same-sex marriage could be resolved sooner than everyone thought.

But Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull says his government remains committed to holding a plebiscite before MPs voted on the law change.

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