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# New threat from AIDS

By **JASON FRENKEL**

VICTORIA is heading for a surge of AIDS cases with rising levels of unprotected sex among HIV-positive people, doctors have warned.

Tired safe-sex messages have been blamed for the alarming statistics in a report on Australians living with HIV and AIDS.

Almost half the Victorians questioned in the study admitted they didn't always wear a condom when having

## Safe sex message loses impact

casual sex. The statistics in the *HIV Futures II Victoria* report come after a dramatic rise in the number of HIV cases in Victoria.

"It's been called the post-AIDS era but I would call it the new AIDS era," said Dr Rob Moodie, chairman of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on AIDS, Hepatitis and Related Diseases.

The committee learned late last year that there had been a

41 per cent increase in HIV notifications in Victoria in the first six months of 2000.

"It's a major concern, and it's going to be a real challenge to try (to) reverse some of these trends," he said.

One of the report's authors, Jeffrey Grierson from the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, said studies had shown that HIV-positive people generally had unprotected sex when they

knew their partner was also HIV-positive.

But the centre's national statistics revealed that more than a fifth did not always wear a condom even though they knew their partners to be HIV-negative.

And almost half — a staggering 48 per cent — sometimes had unprotected sex despite being unsure of their partner's health status.

Mr Grierson said a gener-

ation of sexually active people had grown up with safe-sex education and it was becoming increasingly difficult to sustain the impact of the message.

"It possibly doesn't have the importance or sense of crisis about it that it used to," he said.

The executive director of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations, Robin Gorna, said advances in the treatment of AIDS and the waning impact of the safe-sex message meant the community was less vigilant.

Ms Gorna said the Government, health groups and community organisations needed to create new strategies to reinforce the message.