



Drug watch on schoolies

**Matt Cunningham and
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THOUSANDS of teenagers are leaving anxious parents as they head to Queensland and Victoria's surf coast for schoolies celebrations.

About 30,000 school leavers are expected to hit the Gold Coast from today, while thousands more will head to party spots at Phillip Island and Lorne.

As the schoolies head off after finishing their exams, police and welfare workers have warned that drugs, alcohol, unsafe sex and gang activity could spoil the fun.

Gold Coast Acting Supt Jim Keogh said police were concerned about illicit drug use and planned

to come down hard on drug dealers and users.

"Anyone found in possession of drugs or, more importantly, found supplying drugs will be immediately moved from the precinct and arrested," he said.

Supt Keogh said police sniffer dogs would patrol the edge of the party area.

Queensland police are drawing officers from as far away as Cairns to help control the Gold Coast celebrations.

There were also concerns organised gangs would head to the area.

But Supt Keogh said gangs would be easily identified and quickly dealt with by police.

"Certainly if we see any of those people in the CBD police will take action," he said.

Sen-Sgt Tim Hardiman,

of the Victoria Police youth affairs unit, said schoolies needed to be mindful of local residents.

"It's about young kids in Victoria remembering that they are a visitor to these places," he said.

"It is much better if they can all work together by behaving appropriately, watching their language and if they are old enough (to legally drink), watching their intake of alcohol."

Sen-Sgt Hardiman recommended parents keep in regular contact with their children.

"I have been through this with my kids and they had a great time," he said.

"And I hope the kids this year will have a fun and safe time."

But sexual health organisation Marie Stopes International is warning the fun for some could be

ruined by sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies. The organisation will offer free condoms to all Gold Coast schoolies.

"Unfortunately, we have traditionally seen an increase in the number of people needing advice for unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections reported in the weeks following the schoolies vacation," the group's CEO Suzanne Dvorak said.

"It is therefore vital that teenagers have access to condoms and that they use them at all times."

Almost 50,000 students will receive their VCE results on December 11.