

**Public Awareness of AIDS 1999:
Knowledge, attitudes and behaviour relating to protection
against AIDS**

**English summary of a repeat survey by the
Federal Centre for Health Education, Cologne**

Introduction

The Federal Centre for Health Education evaluates the AIDS education campaign in the Federal Republic of Germany by, among other things, conducting annual representative surveys of the general population. These repeat surveys measure changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour relating to the prevention of HIV and AIDS, and they explore the latest information and communication behaviour on the subject of AIDS. This report summarises the main results of the last repeat survey conducted at the end of 1999.

Details of the study: Goals and methods

| | |
|---|---|
| Project title: | Public Awareness of AIDS in the Federal Republic of Germany 1999. |
| Goals: | Evaluation of the AIDS education campaign via a long-term study of the changes in information and communication behaviour, and in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in relation to AIDS, particularly to protection against HIV infection. |
| Study method: | Annual representative surveys of the over-sixteen population in the Federal Republic of Germany since 1987 (including the new Federal Länder since 1991). |
| Data acquisition method: | Computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) |
| Selection procedure: | Sample size: 3,600 persons. Random sample (computer-generated random telephone numbers, random selection of people in the household); disproportionately stratified sampling plan as regards age (16 to 44 year-olds: 2,400 cases) |
| Survey period: | October 1999 to January 2000 |
| Data documentation, computer analysis and graphic design: | forsa, Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen mbH, Dortmund/Berlin |
| Concept development, analysis and reporting | Federal Centre for Health Education, Cologne, Unit 2-25, Gerhard Christiansen and Jürgen Töppich |

Knowledge of infection risks

The basic knowledge of infection risks and non-risks that is required to prevent and understand HIV and AIDS was already nearly completely spread throughout the population in 1987, shortly after the start of the AIDS education campaign. This high level of information has remained stable up to 1999. For example, nearly everyone (99%) in 1999 is aware of the risk of unprotected sexual contact with unknown partners and is thus capable of avoiding HIV infections. Similarly, virtually everyone (98%) knows that intravenous drug use with shared needles is risky, or that blood-to-blood contact in general can lead to HIV infection.

The level of information is comparably high regarding the fact that the virus cannot be communicated in everyday situations, such as bodily contact when greeting an AIDS patient or working together with a person infected with HIV.

LEVEL OF INFORMATION ON TRANSMISSION

General population

Time series data for West Germany

| | 1987 | 1988 | 1995 | 1998 | 1999 | |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| | | | | | West | Total |
| Percentage who say a risk of infection exists if ... | | | | | | |
| You have unprotected sex with unknown partners | 96 | 98 | 98 | 99 | 99 | 99 |
| Blood from someone infected with HIV gets into a wound | 97 | 96 | 98 | 98 | 98 | 98 |
| Someone takes heroin or similar drugs with a needle previously used by other drug addicts | - | - | 98 | 98 | 98 | 98 |
| Percentage who say <u>no</u> risk of infection exists if ... | | | | | | |
| You shake hands with an AIDS patient | 95 | 96 | 97 | 96 | 97 | 96 |
| You work together with someone infected with HIV | 94 | 94 | 96 | 95 | 96 | 96 |

Source: BZgA - Representative surveys "Public Awareness of AIDS", conducted by forsa. Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen, Berlin/Dortmund

Attitudes towards people with HIV and AIDS

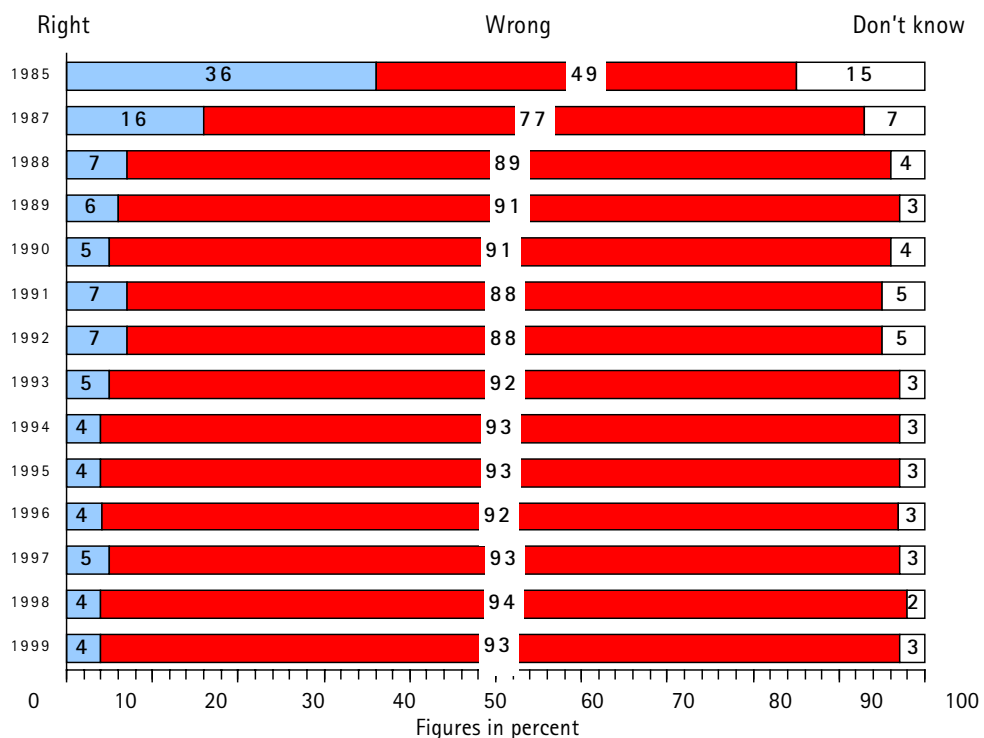
Four percent of the general population in 1999 are of the opinion that AIDS patients should not come into contact with anyone (except medical personnel and relatives), while 93 percent reject the isolation of people with AIDS. This and other results of the study show that the general attitude towards people with HIV and AIDS is basically characterised by a low level of stigmatisation and discrimination. This general attitude also developed in the early years of the AIDS education campaign. In 1985, prior to the start of the campaign, as many as 36 percent of the population of the former Federal Republic supported the opinion that AIDS patients should be isolated.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ISOLATION OF PEOPLE WITH AIDS

General population

Time series data for West Germany

Do you think it right or wrong to make sure that no one with AIDS comes into contact with anyone else - apart from medical personnel and relatives?



1999

| | | | |
|--------------|---|----|---|
| Total | 4 | 93 | 3 |
| (n = 3600) | | | |
| East Germany | 3 | 94 | 3 |
| (n = 682) | | | |

Source: 1985: forsa. - Representative survey
 1987 -1998: BZgA - Representative surveys "Public Awareness of AIDS", conducted by
 forsa. Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen, Berlin/Dortmund

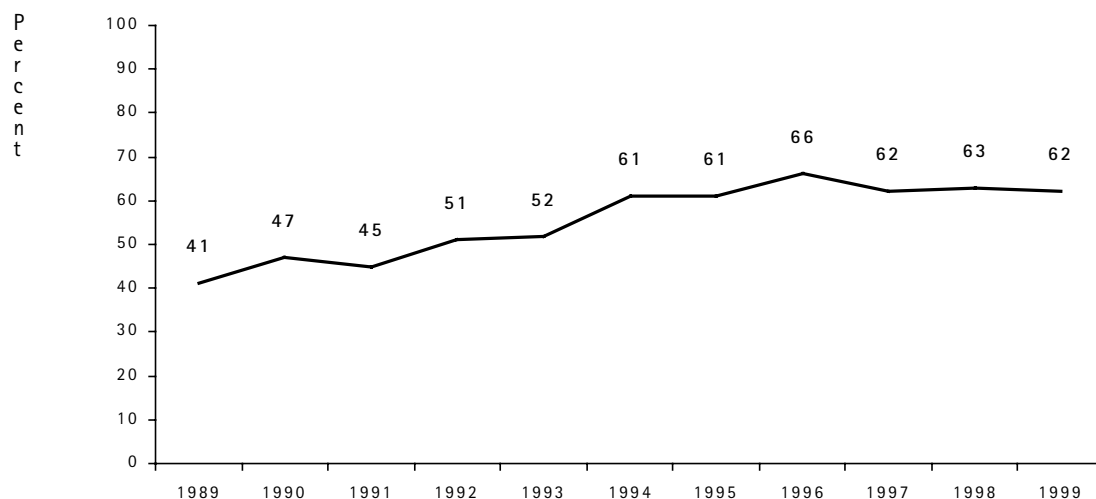
Willingness to practise protective behaviour

The willingness of people to protect themselves against infection with the HI-virus has risen considerably since the beginning of the AIDS education campaign and continues to be high in 1999. This is indicated by the development of the intention to protect among sub-groups of the population who are at a potentially high risk of infection, such as singles up to age 45. The intention to protect is expressed by, among other things, the possession of condoms: between 1989 and 1994, the percentage of young singles who carried condoms with them at the time of the survey rose from 41 to 61 percent in the old Federal Länder. This percentage has not changed significantly since then. It amounts to 61 percent in 1999 (in the entire Federal Republic).

POSSESSION OF CONDOMS AS AN INTENTION TO PROTECT

Singles under age 45

Time series data for West Germany



Trend (as of 1995)

$$y = 63.1 - 0,1x$$

$$t = -0.143, p = 0.8955$$

n = 3070

No significant change at $\alpha = 0.05$

Difference 1998 - 1999

Not significant

$$t = 0.24, p = 0.807$$

1999

Total: 61% (n = 765)

East Germany: 57% (n = 129)

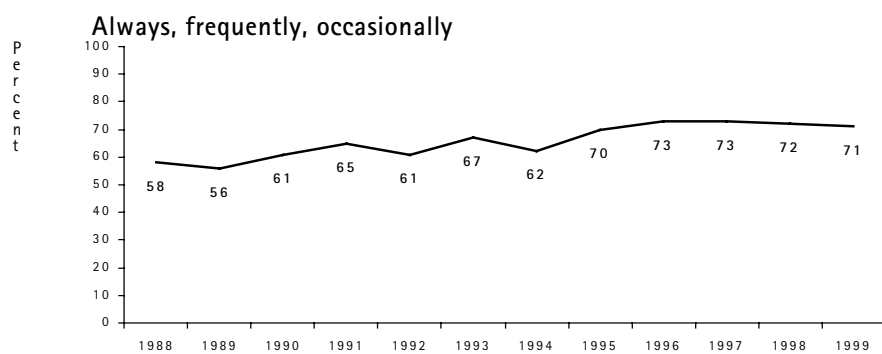
Source: BZgA - Representative surveys "Public Awareness of AIDS", conducted by forsa. Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen, Berlin/Dortmund

Protective behaviour

Actual protective behaviour has spread in a manner similar to the intention to protect. For example, condom use among singles under age 45 initially increased continuously during the course of the AIDS education campaign, reaching a level of nearly 75 percent of this survey group. The figure for 1999 is 71 percent. Similar results are evident in other sub-groups that are of particular significance in terms of prevention due to their sexual lifestyle: 71 percent of people who start a new sexual relationship use condoms at the beginning to protect themselves, while 87 percent of young people between the ages of 16 and 20 are condom-users. Roughly half (46%) the young singles and almost two-thirds (64%) of young people use condoms regularly. However, the repeat surveys of recent years indicate that this positive trend has not continued since 1996, but rather stagnated.

CONDOM USE

Singles under age 45 who had sexual contacts over the past year
Time series data for West Germany



Trend (as of 1995)

$y = 71.1 + 0.3x$
 $t = 0.728, p = 0.5195$
 $n = 2244$

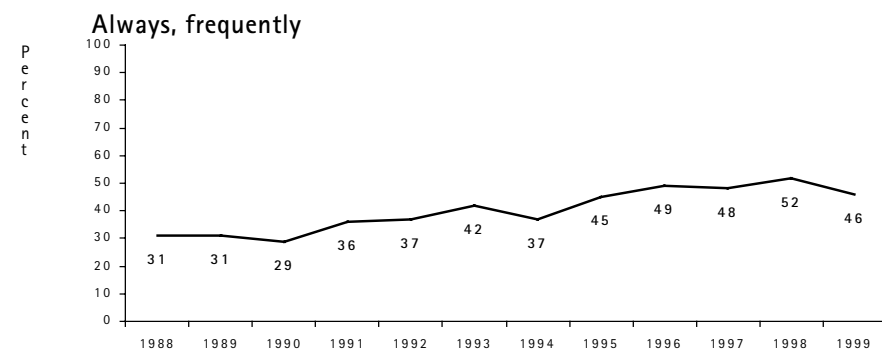
No significant change at $\alpha = 0.05$

Difference 1998 - 1999

Not significant
 $t = 0.15, p = 0.879$

1999

Total: 71% (n = 527)
East Germany: 74% (n = 82)



Trend (as of 1995)

$y = 46.5 + 0.5x$
 $t = 0.522, p = 0.6376$
 $n = 2244$

No significant change at $\alpha = 0.05$

Difference 1998 - 1999

Not significant
 $t = 1.88, p = 0.060$

1999

Total: 45% (n = 527)
East Germany: 47% (n = 82)

Source: BZgA - Representative surveys "Public Awareness of AIDS", conducted by forsa. Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen, Berlin/Dortmund

Familiarity with new AIDS treatments and effects on protective behaviour

Reports on new AIDS treatments have hardly any effect at all on the population. While 21 percent of the population said they had heard something about the new treatments in 1997, this figure is even lower in 1999 at 15 percent. Those who have heard of the new treatment methods have not significantly changed their attitudes towards AIDS as a disease or protection against HIV infections. The idea has become widespread that the life expectancy of people infected with HIV is increased by the treatments. Nevertheless, AIDS is still considered to be an incurable, ultimately fatal disease. There is some uncertainty about whether the virus can still be communicated during treatment with one of the new therapies.

There is no indication that reports on the new treatments have led to greater carelessness or to a decrease in protective behaviour: for example, people who have heard of the new treatments protect themselves during new sexual contacts (72%) just as frequently as those who have not heard of them.

EFFECTS OF THE NEW AIDS TREATMENTS

Perception of AIDS as a disease

Basis: People who have heard of the new treatments (n = 695)

| | | Percentage who agree with the statement... | | | | |
|---|------|--|-------------|------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| | | Completely | More yes | More no | Not at all | Don't know/ No reply |
| The new treatment methods make it possible to live longer with the HIV virus. | 1997 | 66 | 24 | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| | 1998 | 68 | 25 | 1 | 0 | 7 |
| | 1999 | 70 | 21 | 2 | 0 | 7 |
| The new treatment methods make it possible to be completely cured of AIDS. | 1997 | 3 | 3 | 16 | 72 | 6 |
| | 1998 | 3 | 2 | 15 | 75 | 6 |
| | 1999 | 3 | 3 | 9 | 79 | 6 |
| The new treatment methods prevent people who are HIV-positive from transmitting the AIDS virus. | 1997 | 2 | 4 | 14 | 66 | 15 |
| | 1998 | 2 | 3 | 14 | 69 | 12 |
| | 1999 | 3 | 3 | 12 | 71 | 11 |

Source: BZgA - Representative survey "Public Awareness of AIDS 1999", conducted by forsa. Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen, Berlin/Dortmund

HIV antibody test

Twenty-eight percent of the general population in West Germany say that they have had an HIV antibody test performed at some time (singles under 45: 35 percent). The corresponding figures for East Germany are far below the West German values. Sixteen percent of the general population and 23 percent of young singles there have had the test performed. Accordingly, roughly one-fourth (26%) of the over-16 population in the entire Federal Republic of Germany has already had an HIV antibody test performed one or more times (singles under 45: 33 percent).

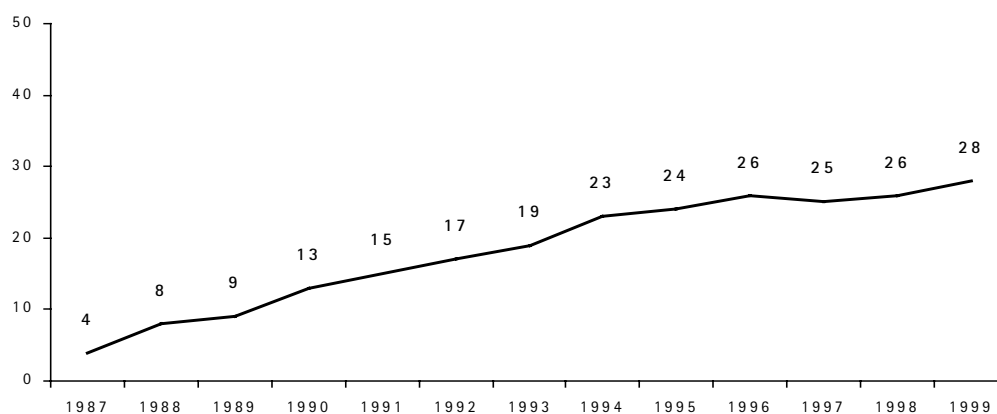
The long-term development indicates a largely continuous increase, even in recent years, in the percentage of people having the HIV antibody test (for the first time).

USE OF THE HIV ANTIBODY TEST

General population

Time series data for West Germany

Percentage who have already had an HIV antibody test performed:



1999

Total: 26% (n = 3600)

East Germany: 16% (n = 682)

Source: BZgA - Representative surveys "Public Awareness of AIDS", conducted by forsa. Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen, Berlin/Dortmund

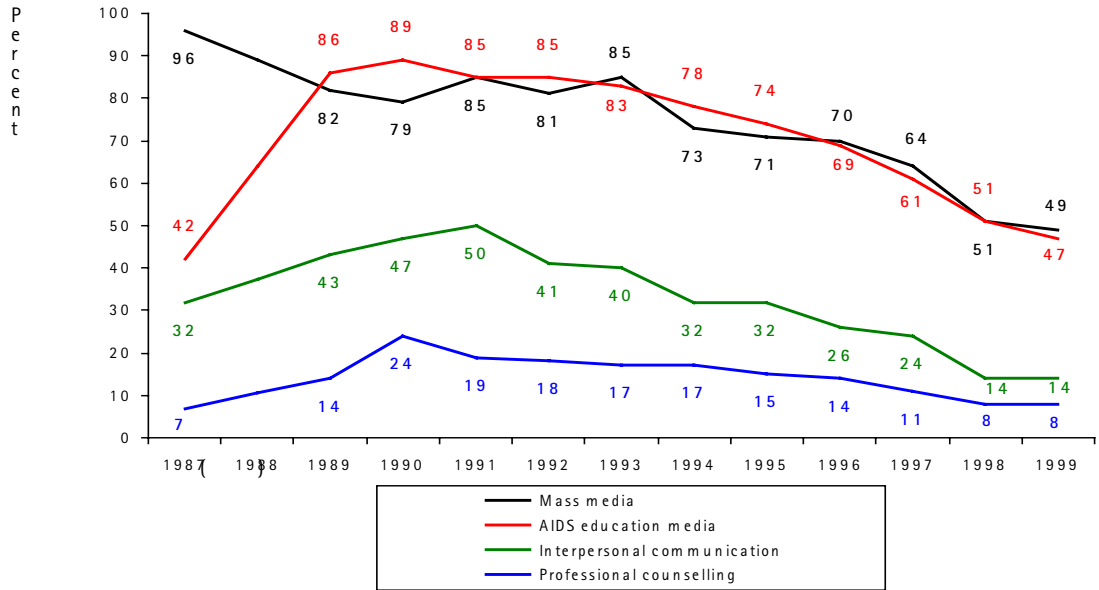
Information and communication behaviour

Since about 1993, the subject of AIDS has been addressed much less frequently in public and private communication. This is evident in the marked decrease in the use of information offers on AIDS. In 1993, for example, 83 percent of the (over-16) general population in West Germany obtained information from the media used in the AIDS education campaign, such as TV spots, brochures, newspaper advertisements and information events. This figure was 51 percent in 1998 (East Germany in 1998: 57 percent).

The use of media on AIDS did not drop as much from 1998 to 1999. For example, use of the media of the AIDS education campaign decreased from 51 to 47 percent in West Germany and from 57 to 53 percent in East Germany. This decline is primarily due to the decreasing trend in the use of AIDS spots on TV, while the use of newspaper advertisements, brochures and information events remained unchanged compared to 1998.

UTILISATION OF INFORMATION OFFERS

General population
Time series data for West Germany



Source: BZgA - Representative surveys "Public Awareness of AIDS", conducted by forsa. Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen, Berlin/Dortmund

The density of communication on the subject of AIDS has increased in recent years due to a number of additional media programmes offered by the Federal Centre for Health Education. The following table shows the extent to which they were used in 1999: the "Mach's mit" (Join in) campaign had a particularly broad reach. Seventy-five percent of the general population and 92 percent of young people have already heard of it. Above all, it is remarkable to note that target groups that are of particular importance for prevention are currently (in the last 3 months prior to the survey) aware of the campaign and thus come into contact with its key message, the call to use condoms: 65 percent of young singles and 71 percent of young people between the ages of 16 and 20. In addition, AIDS education reached roughly one-fifth of these target groups via radio spots and one-fourth via cinema spots. The Internet currently plays only a minor role. Two percent of 16 to 44 year-old singles and 2 percent of young people recently obtained information on AIDS via the Internet.

| PERCEPTION OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OFFERS OF THE AIDS EDUCATION CAMPAIGN | | | |
|--|------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| General population | | | |
| | Singles under 45 | Young people ages 16 to 20 | General population in total |
| | % | % | % |
| Have seen posters for the "Mach's mit" campaign at some time | 89 | 92 | 75 |
| Have seen "Mach's mit" posters in the last 3 months | 65 | 71 | 47 |
| Have noticed other advertisements for the "Mach's mit" campaign | 67 | 70 | 55 |
| Have seen cinema spots on AIDS education in the last 3 months | 25 | 28 | 10 |
| Have heard radio spots on AIDS education in the last 3 months | 19 | 18 | 21 |
| Have obtained information on AIDS from the Internet in the last 3 months | 2 | 2 | 1 |

Source: BZgA - Representative survey "Public Awareness of AIDS 1999", conducted by forsa. Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen, Berlin/Dortmund

Conclusion

The results on information and communication behaviour obtained from the "Public Awareness of AIDS" study indicate a declining trend since 1993. The perception and reception of media that provide information and education on AIDS have been declining from year to year. This also applies to 1999, even though the decline is less dramatic than in previous years. In recent years, the Federal Centre for Health Education has successfully drawn the attention of the younger target groups, in particular, to the subject of protection against AIDS through the use of new media programmes.

In line with the overall decrease in communication on AIDS, protective behaviour has also been stagnant since 1996. For example, the use of condoms did not increase any more in 1999, even among groups that are of particular significance for prevention due to their sexual lifestyle, such as young singles.

The general attitude towards people with HIV and AIDS has not been affected by the decrease in communication on AIDS. It continues to be characterised by only a low level of stigmatisation and discrimination.

The knowledge of the general population concerning infection risks and non-risks also continues to be high. However, a high level of knowledge about risky situations alone is not sufficient for ensuring the further spread of protective behaviour. It is additionally necessary to have an education strategy that motivates people to protect themselves and promotes the acquisition of the skills necessary to practise protective behaviour. However, it would seem that an AIDS education campaign of this kind can only be effective if it is equipped with the necessary interventions and coverage.

The results of the study do not indicate that the German population is "tired" of AIDS education or "saturated" with information on AIDS. On the contrary, nearly three-fourths (72%) of singles under 45 again said in 1999 that they were interested in information on protection against AIDS.