

# Public Awareness of AIDS in the Federal Republic of Germany 2005

Knowledge, attitudes and behaviour  
relating to protection against AIDS

A repeat survey by the  
Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA), Cologne

## Summary

May 2006



**Bundeszentrale  
für  
gesundheitliche  
Aufklärung**



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Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA)  
Section 2-25, Ostmerheimer Strasse 220, D-51109 Köln, Germany  
Tel.: +49 (0)221 8992-307, Fax: +49 (0)221 8992-300, Internet: [www.bzga.de/studien](http://www.bzga.de/studien)

## **Preliminary note**

Since the mid-1980s, the AIDS prevention campaign has been informing the population of the Federal Republic of Germany about the disease AIDS and the associated infection risks, particularly providing education regarding the fact that people should protect themselves against infection with HIV, and ways of doing so.

The impact of this AIDS prevention campaign on knowledge, attitudes and behaviour relating to HIV and AIDS has been studied by the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) since 1987 by means of the long-term study entitled "Public Awareness of AIDS", which comprises annual, nationwide surveys conducted among the general public over the age of 16 in the Federal Republic of Germany.

These representative surveys examine

- The extent to which the campaign's various prevention measures reach the public,
- Whether the level of knowledge necessary for AIDS prevention continues to be maintained,
- The extent to which people protect themselves against sexual transmission of the virus by using condoms, especially those people who are of particular importance in the context of AIDS prevention, such as 16 to 44 year-old singles,
- Whether people with HIV and AIDS are isolated in the attitudes of the public, or rather regarded as people needing attention and help.

The present Summary contains the central results of the latest survey, which was completed at the end of 2005. Key indicators are presented as medium or long-term trends, such as those relating to the reach of the campaign media, knowledge of when there is a risk or no risk of an HIV infection, protective intentions and protective behaviour, as well as willingness to help people with HIV and AIDS.

A detailed report on the results can be requested from the Federal Centre for Health Education or downloaded from the Internet.

## Details of the study: Goals and methods

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.																								
Study method:	Annual representative surveys of the population over the age of 16 in the Federal Republic of Germany since 1987 (including the new Federal Länder since 1994).																								
Data acquisition method:	Computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI)																								
Selection procedure:	Multi-stage random sample (based on the ADM telephone sample system, random selection of persons in the household); disproportionately stratified sampling plan as regards age (16 to 44 year-olds: 2,276 cases).																								
Sample size:	<table><tr><td>Total:</td><td>3,600</td></tr><tr><td>Western Germany:</td><td>2,993</td></tr><tr><td>Eastern Germany:</td><td>607</td></tr><tr><td>Men:</td><td>1,766</td></tr><tr><td>Women:</td><td>1,834</td></tr><tr><td>Singles under the age of 45:</td><td>1,026</td></tr><tr><td>Men:</td><td>588</td></tr><tr><td>Women:</td><td>438</td></tr><tr><td>16 to 29 year-olds:</td><td>915</td></tr><tr><td>Men:</td><td>467</td></tr><tr><td>Women:</td><td>448</td></tr><tr><td>16 to 20 year-olds:</td><td>311</td></tr></table>	Total:	3,600	Western Germany:	2,993	Eastern Germany:	607	Men:	1,766	Women:	1,834	Singles under the age of 45:	1,026	Men:	588	Women:	438	16 to 29 year-olds:	915	Men:	467	Women:	448	16 to 20 year-olds:	311
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Survey period:	September 2005 to December 2005																								
Data acquisition and statistical analysis:	forsa. Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen mbH, Berlin/Dortmund																								
Concept development, analysis and reporting:	Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA), Cologne, Section 2-25, Gerhard Christiansen, Ursula von Räden and Jürgen Töppich																								

## Information behaviour

The repeat surveys of the "Public Awareness of AIDS" study regularly examine information behaviour regarding AIDS. This makes it possible to observe the extent to which the various AIDS prevention media reach the German public over the course of time. The percentage reached is examined both in reference to the last 12 months and also in reference to the more recent period of the last three months.

The reaches of the mass-media forms of AIDS prevention are compiled in Table 1. These media are the posters of the "mach's mit" campaign ("join in" campaign), with its colourful condom motifs, and the TV spots, as well as the cinema spots, radio spots and advertisements in newspapers, journals or illustrated magazines.

The greatest reach is recorded for the "mach's mit" posters, which have been perceived by 74 percent of the general population over the age of 16 of any year. One or more TV spots have been seen by 65 percent.

**Table 1 Reaches of mass-media AIDS education among the general population over the age of 16** In percent

People having contact with:		In the last 3 months	In the last 12 months	On some occasion in the past
"mach's mit" posters	2002	51	71	82
	2003	53	72	84
	2004	55	75	85
	2005	55	74	85
TV spots	2002	44	70	90
	2003	44	69	91
	2004	43	69	89
	2005	39	65	89
Advertisements in newspapers/magazines	2002	40	61	83
	2003	41	62	84
	2004	38	60	83
	2005	37	58	82
AIDS education radio spots	2002	21	32	39
	2003	27	38	45
	2004	26	39	44
	2005	23	34	42
AIDS education cinema spots	2002	11	24	51
	2003	11	24	51
	2004	13	27	54
	2005	10	23	53
At least one of the mass-media AIDS education offerings	2002	75	90	98
	2003	77	91	98
	2004	77	91	98
	2005	76	91	98

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

The perception of the "mach's mit" posters by the general population remained virtually unchanged compared to 2004. A slight drop can be seen as regards the advertisements. The decreases in the reach of the other media are rather more pronounced. For instance, 69 percent had seen TV spots containing AIDS education in a 12-month period in 2004, the figure for

2005 being 65 percent. The decline for radio spots is similar, from 39 percent in 2004 to 34 percent in 2005. A downward trend can also be observed as regards the cinema spots: from 27 percent to 23 percent.

The total reach of the mass media has remained largely unchanged. The results for 2005 show that, just as in 2004, 91 percent of the general population over the age of 16 perceived one or more of the mass-media AIDS education offerings at least once in the past 12 months (see Table 1). 76 percent also had contact with this or that offering of mass-media AIDS education in the relatively short period of three months. The figure for the previous year was 77 percent.

The fact that the total reaches remain largely unchanged, despite the declining reaches of individual media, points out a particular advantage of the multimedia strategy used in AIDS education: a decline in the utilisation of one of the education options can be compensated for by other media. In recent times, this compensation has mainly been achieved by the "mach's mit" posters, which have a particularly extensive reach.

The reach of offerings involving intensive AIDS education is reported below (Table 2), i.e. the utilisation of brochures, information events or the Internet. These media, whose task is to provide comprehensive and intensive AIDS education, have a distinctly lower reach among the general population than the AIDS education mass media. The utilisation of brochures by the general population has declined slightly in recent years. There has been a striking increase in utilisation of the Internet in recent years. 12 percent obtained information about AIDS on the Internet in 2005.

**Table 2 Reaches of offerings of intensive AIDS education among the general population over the age of 16** In percent

		In the last 3 months	In the last 12 months	On some occasion in the past
People having contact with AIDS education brochures	2002	8	21	52
	2003	7	22	56
	2004	7	20	53
	2005	6	18	52
People attending lectures or information events	2002	3	6	24
	2003	2	6	27
	2004	2	6	25
	2005	2	6	26
People using the Internet to obtain information	2002	3	5	7
	2003	2	4	7
	2004	3	6	10
	2005	3	6	12
People having contact with at least one of the offerings of intensive AIDS education	2002	11	25	60
	2003	9	26	63
	2004	10	25	62
	2005	9	24	62

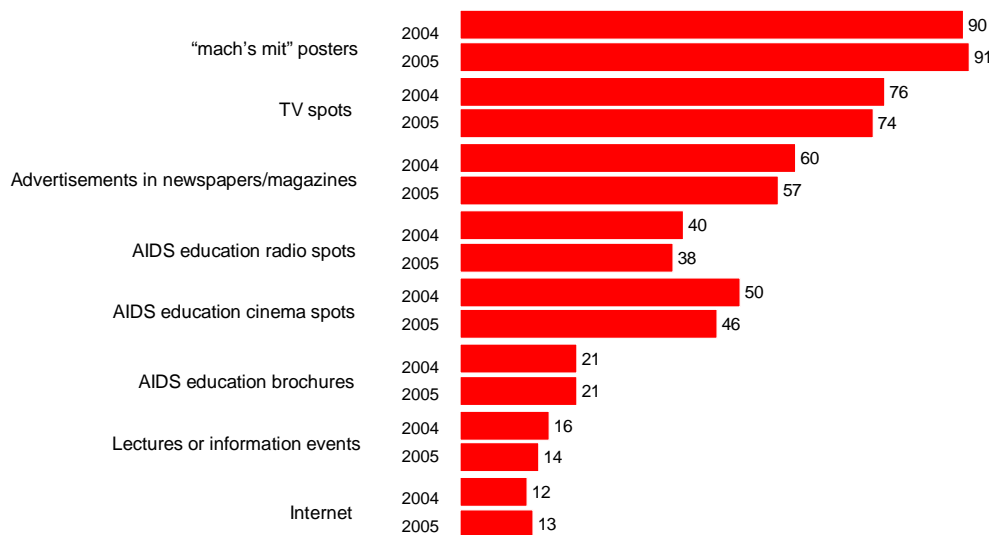
Source: BZgA – Representative surveys "Public Awareness of AIDS",  
conducted by forsa. Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen, Berlin/Dortmund

The 16 to 44 year-old singles are reached more effectively by mass-media AIDS education than the average for the general population. For instance, 91 percent of them have seen "mach's mit" posters, as opposed to 74 percent of the general population. TV spots and cinema spots likewise have significantly higher reach values among younger singles.

Similarly, the media offering intensive AIDS education are used more frequently by singles between the ages of 16 and 44 than by the overall population. As regards personal communication-based AIDS prevention by means of presentations and information events, the reach is more than twice as high. The picture is the same for the Internet. Thus, one-quarter (25%) of younger singles have so far turned to the Internet to obtain information about HIV and AIDS on some occasion.

**Fig. 1 Reaches of mass-media AIDS education** In percent  
Singles under the age of 45

People having contact with media in the last 12 months:



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

Compared to the general population, and also to young people, the reaches are more stable among the younger singles. In 2005, for example, they were not only reached by the "mach's mit" posters to the same extent as in 2004, but also by the TV spots and the AIDS education brochures. The utilisation of information events and presentations, as well as the Internet, for obtaining information about AIDS likewise remained largely stable. Again, exceptions among the younger singles were, on the one hand, the radio spots and, above all, the cinema spots, which were seen less owing to the general decline in the number of cinema-goers.



## Perception of the disease AIDS

One important indicator for the significance attached to AIDS in the awareness of the population is the proportion who perceive AIDS as a particularly dangerous disease.

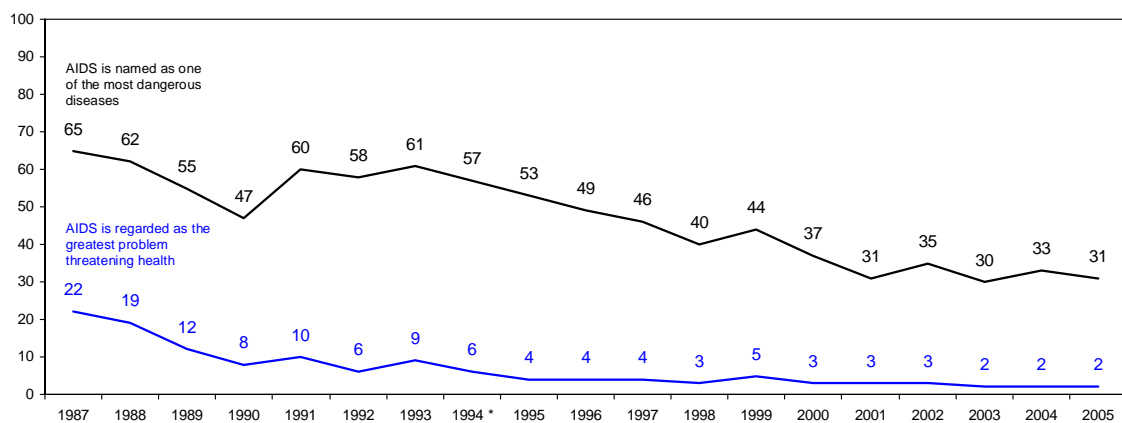
In the late 1980s, two-thirds of the general population over the age of 16 regarded AIDS as being one of the most dangerous diseases. This figure declined steadily after 1993. Since 2000, the percentage of people rating AIDS as one of the most dangerous diseases has remained constant at roughly one-third, with slight variation from year to year. In 2005, 31 percent said AIDS (for comparison: cancer was named by 59 percent).

Moreover, only few people (2%) today still consider AIDS as one of the greatest problems posing a particular threat to the health of the German population. This notion of AIDS being a threat was likewise much more common in the late 1980s than today. At that time, almost one-quarter (22%) of the general population over the age of 16 had this idea.

**Fig. 2 Perception of the disease AIDS**

In percent

General population over the age of 16



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

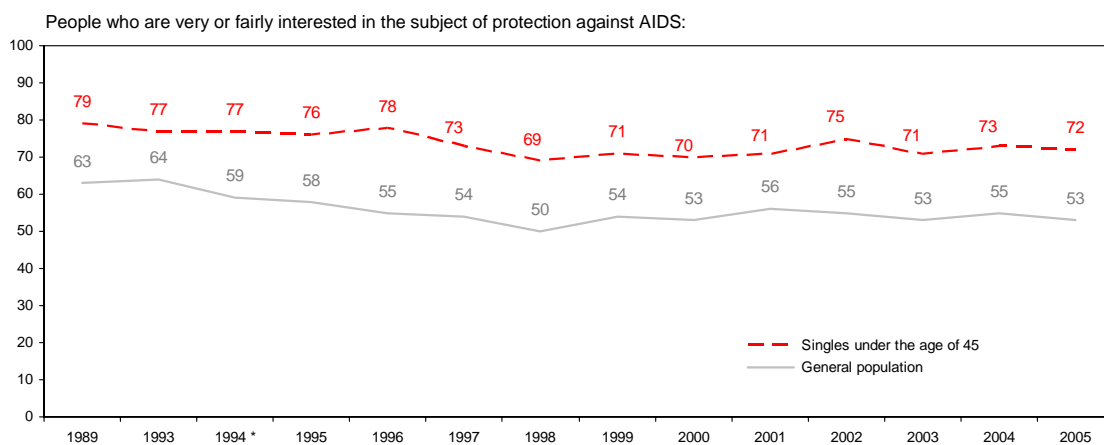
\* Including the new Federal Länder from 1994

## Interest in the subject of AIDS

There is still widespread interest in protection against AIDS. Almost three-quarters (72%) of the group of younger singles, which is of particular importance for prevention, currently expect information on options for protecting themselves against an HIV infection. However, interest in information on protection against AIDS is also relatively great in general. More than half (53%) of the general population over the age of 16 continues to be interested in information on protection options and protective behaviour.

Interest is great as regards medical research into the disease, which interests 83 percent of the general population. Many people would also like to know something about the living situation of people with AIDS and HIV: 61 percent of the general population.

**Fig. 3 Interest in information on protection against AIDS** In percent



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

\* Including the new Federal Länder from 1994

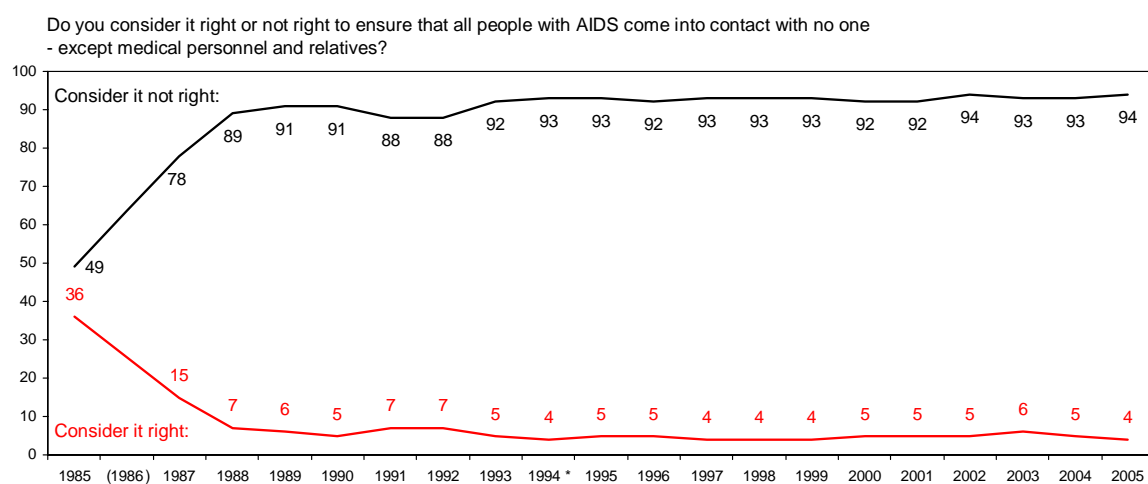
## Attitudes towards people with HIV and AIDS

The general attitude towards people with HIV and AIDS remains stable. It is characterised both by a low level of stigmatising and isolating attitudes, and by great willingness to provide social support and assistance.

The fact that AIDS education played an important role in the development of the general attitude towards people with HIV and AIDS can be illustrated with the help of the indicator relating to the isolation of people with AIDS, which has been assessed since the mid-1980s. In 2005, 94 percent of the entire German population rejected the isolation of people with AIDS, 4 percent advocating it.

In 1985 - before the start of the AIDS education campaign - more than one-third (36%) of the general population over the age of 16 in what was then West Germany was of the opinion that all people with AIDS should not come into contact with anyone except medical staff or their relatives.

**Fig. 4 Attitude towards the isolation of people with AIDS** In percent  
General population over the age of 16



Source: 1985: forsa. – Representative survey  
1987 - 2005: BZgA – Representative surveys "Public Awareness of AIDS",  
conducted by forsa. Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen, Berlin/Dortmund

\* Including the new Federal Länder from 1994

## Information status

Shortly after the start of the AIDS education campaign, the knowledge of the general population regarding AIDS had already reached a very high level. This high level of knowledge has been maintained right up to 2005. Almost 100 percent of the general population possesses the basic knowledge of the most important infection risks that is necessary for protection against AIDS. In 2005, almost everyone (99%) knew about the possibility of infection risks in connection with sexual contacts. Similarly, 99 percent were aware of the risk involved in sharing needles in the event of intravenous drug use. 98 percent said an infection risk exists if blood from someone infected with HIV gets into an open wound. The population is informed to an equally great extent that *no* infection risks exist in other everyday situations involving contact with people with HIV: 98 percent see no infection risk in shaking hands with people with AIDS. 96 percent know that no infection risk exists when sharing a workplace with people with HIV.

These results do not mean that all the options for disseminating AIDS-related knowledge have already been exhausted. The level of information regarding the transmissibility of the virus during an HIV infection is comparatively low. This can be seen from the responses to the question regarding knowledge of the fact that people with HIV can transmit the virus prior to developing the full clinical picture of AIDS. In 2005, 79 percent answered this question correctly; in 2000, the figure was 75 percent. Another indicator is knowledge concerning the meaning of a positive result of the HIV antibody test. 73 percent of the general population replied in 2005 that such a test result means that "you have the virus in your blood" (and can thus transmit it); in 2000, 70 percent said this. 78 percent of the general population said there are *no* visible signs of an HIV infection. In 2000, 67 percent said there were no external signs of an HIV infection.

**Table 3 Knowledge of transmission routes**

In percent

General population over the age of 16						
	1987	1988	2002	2003	2004	2005
<b>People saying that a risk of infection exists if ...</b>						
you have unprotected sex, i.e. without a condom, with an unknown partner	96	98	100	99	100	99
blood of someone infected with HIV gets into an open wound	97	98	99	99	99	98
someone takes heroin or similar drugs intravenously – using a needle that has already been used by other drug addicts	-	-	99	99	99	99
<b>People saying that no risk of infection exists if ...</b>						
you shake hands with a person with AIDS	95	96	97	97	98	98
you share a workplace with someone infected with AIDS	94	94	96	96	97	96

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

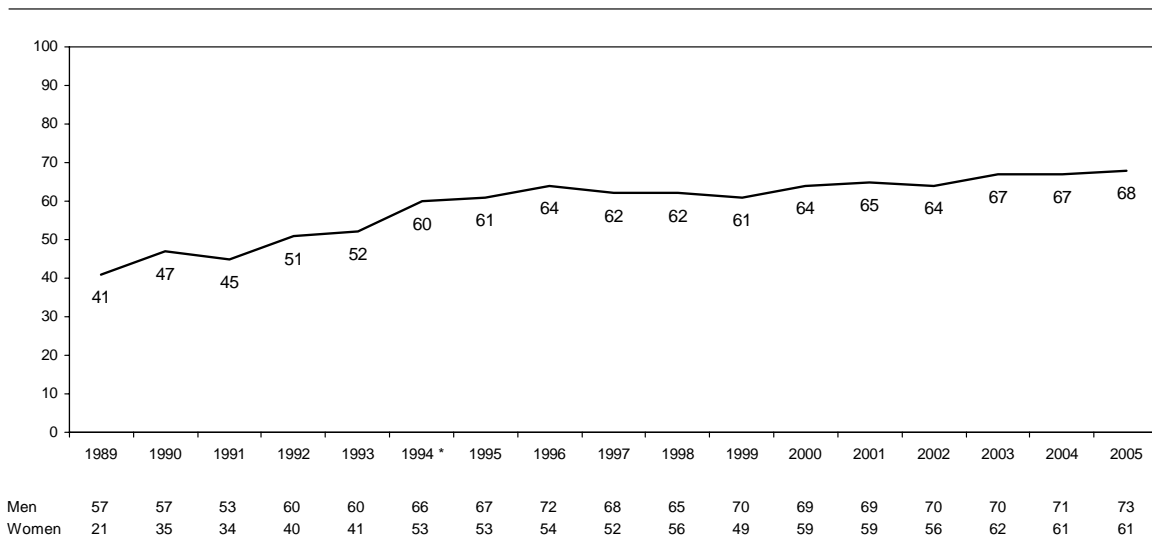
## Protection against AIDS

The willingness to use condoms as protection against an HIV infection is additionally expressed in an indicator that is more specifically geared to actual protective behaviour. It examines the proportion of people who currently have condoms at home or on their person (Fig. 5). The figure for singles under the age of 45 was 68 percent in 2005.

Viewed in the long term, a substantial increase in condom possession, totalling 27 percentage points overall, can be determined since 1989. However, the greater part of this increase already occurred between 1989 and the mid-1990s, since which time the value for this indicator has continued to rise, but only very slowly.

The change in the possession of condoms among younger single women is worthy of note: in 1989, 21 percent said they had condoms at home or with them. The corresponding figure for men was 57 percent, this making a difference of 36 percentage points. In 2005, more than one-half (61%) of the younger single women had condoms available.

**Fig. 5 Condom possession as an intention to protect** In percent  
Singles under the age of 45



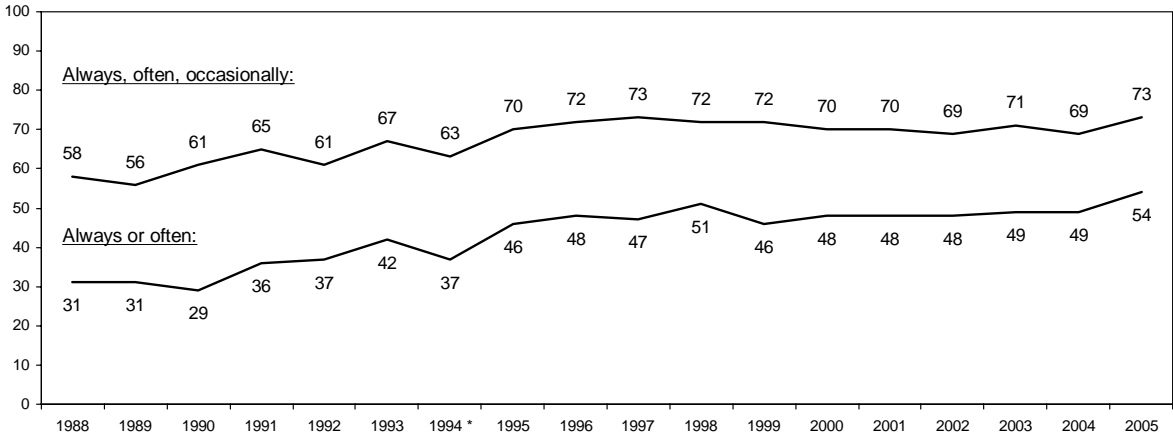
Source: BZgA – Representative surveys "Public Awareness of AIDS",  
conducted by forsa. Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen, Berlin/Dortmund

\* Including the new Federal Länder from 1994

There has been an increase in the use of condoms between 2004 and 2005. In 2005, 73 percent of the singles under the age of 45 had always, often or occasionally used condoms during sexual contacts in the past 12 months. The figure in 2004 was 69 percent. Regular condom use (always or often) has likewise risen compared to 2004 - from 49 percent to the current value of 54 percent.

This renewed increase in condom use is particularly remarkable in view of the fact that it had stagnated in the preceding years, and even declined in the subgroups displaying potentially risky behavioural patterns.

**Fig. 6 Condom use of singles under the age of 45 having sexual contacts in the past year** In percent



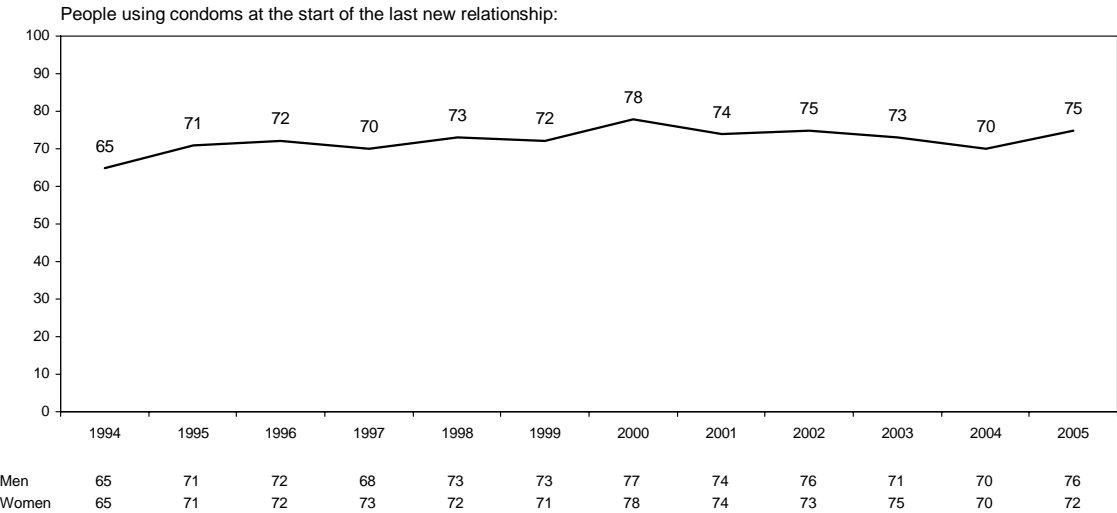
Source: BZgA – Representative surveys "Public Awareness of AIDS", conducted by forsa. Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen, Berlin/Dortmund

\* Including the new Federal Länder from 1994

Thus, there has also been an increase in the use of condoms (always, often or occasionally) among people having several sex partners. The proportion of condom users in this group had declined rapidly in the preceding years, from 83 percent in 2001 to 77 percent in 2004. In 2005, it rose to 82 percent again.

The increase was even more distinct among respondents who had begun a new sexual relationship in the preceding 12 months. In 2005, 75 percent of them said that they had used condoms at the start. The figure had dropped from 78 percent in 2000 to 70 percent in 2004.

**Fig. 7 Condom use at the start of new relationships** In percent  
 Interviewees with new sexual relationships in the past 12 months

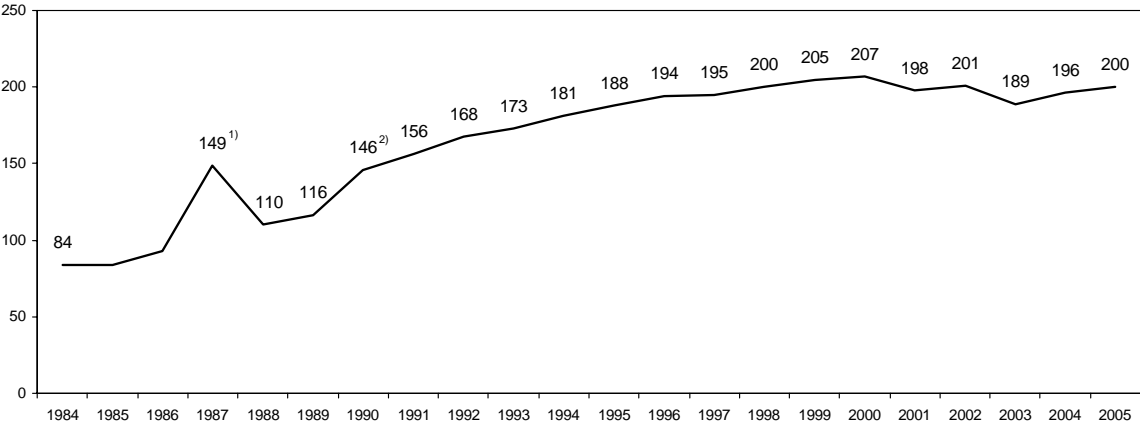


Source: BZgA – Representative surveys “Public Awareness of AIDS”, conducted by forsa. Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen, Berlin/Dortmund

The development of condom use can also be seen from external data, such as condom sales figures, these being collected and published by the German Latex Research Information Centre (Informationszentrum der Deutschen Latexforschung).

The condom sales figures declined from 207 million in 2000 to 189 million in 2003. However, this trend did not continue, condom sales instead beginning to rise again, to 200 million in 2005. The development of the sales figures curve is largely similar to that of the survey data on condom use, although the rise in condom sales started earlier.

**Fig. 8 Condom sales** In millions  
 Condom sales figures



<sup>1)</sup> Stockpiling purchases by retailers  
<sup>2)</sup> Including Eastern Germany from 1990

Source: Deutsche Latexforschungsgemeinschaft Kondome e.V.



## **Summary of the results**

The media of AIDS education still reach the great majority of the population. This is not least due to the fact that several media with different communication channels and potential reaches are used, including such high-reach media as the "mach's mit" posters, with which three-quarters of the population over the age of 16 are familiar.

The reaches of individual media, such as the TV spots, radio spots, cinema spots and AIDS education brochures, decreased slightly in 2005, compared to 2004. This decline refers mainly to older groups. Among younger (16 to 44 year-old) singles, who are an important target group for AIDS education, the reaches of the education media are largely stable. The cinema spots are the only exception here, apparently having been seen by fewer people as a result of the decline in the number of cinema-goers in 2005.

The perception of AIDS has changed significantly since the 1980s. Moreover, the disease is today considered to be far less of a threat. While two-thirds of the population over the age of 16 still rated AIDS as one of the most dangerous diseases in 1987, less than one-third (31%) say this at the moment.

However, the population still demonstrates very great interest in AIDS education information. In particular, the younger singles would in future like to continue to receive education on how they can protect themselves against an HIV infection.

The general attitude towards people with HIV and AIDS also displays long-term stability. It continues to be characterised by the fact that almost everyone (94%) rejects the isolation of people with HIV and AIDS.

Similarly, almost the entire population continues to have preventive knowledge relating to HIV and AIDS. Virtually the whole population possesses the basic knowledge necessary for protection against AIDS: substantially more than nine-tenths are informed about the ways in which an HIV infection can be transmitted. Equally many are also aware of the situations in which there is no risk of infection.

The willingness to use condoms as protection against an HIV infection during sexual contacts has continued to rise slowly in recent years. For example, 68 percent of the younger singles say they have condoms at home or on their person.

There was an increase in actual condom use in 2005. Thus, the proportion of people stating that they use condoms at the start of new sexual contacts has risen from 70 percent in 2004 to 75 percent in 2005. This renewed increase in condom use is particularly remarkable in view of the fact that it had stagnated in the preceding years, and even declined in the subgroups displaying potentially risky behavioural patterns.

The renewed increase in condom use can be seen from various indicators used in the repeat survey of the "Public Awareness of AIDS" study. External data, such as condom sales figures, also display an upward trend in the past two years.