

# Public Awareness of AIDS in the Federal Republic of Germany 2003

Knowledge, attitudes and behaviour  
relating to protection against AIDS

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

## Summary Report

March 2004



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## **Introduction**

Since the start of the AIDS education campaign in 1987, the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) has examined the effect of AIDS prevention on the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of the public regarding HIV and AIDS. To this end, it conducts the annual representative survey "Public Awareness of AIDS" among the general public over the age of 16 in the Federal Republic of Germany. Specifically, the survey examines the degree to which

- education measures reach the public,
- the knowledge necessary for protection against HIV infection spreads,
- people protect themselves against sexual transmission of the virus by using condoms,
- persons with HIV and AIDS are seen as people who need attention and help and should not be isolated by society.

The present summary contains the key results of the latest survey, which was completed at the end of 2003. They are presented together with their longer-term trends, either for the general public as a whole or for subgroups of particular importance for prevention, primarily meaning 16 to 44 year-old singles.

A detailed report (in German) 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 over-sixteen population in the Federal Republic of Germany since 1987 (including the new Federal Länder since 1994).																		
Mode of data collection:	Computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI)																		
Samplings:	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: 2,340 cases).																		
Sample size:	<table><tr><td>Total:</td><td>3,602</td></tr><tr><td>Western Germany:</td><td>2,935</td></tr><tr><td>Eastern Germany:</td><td>667</td></tr><tr><td>16 to 65 year-olds:</td><td>3,134</td></tr><tr><td>Western Germany:</td><td>2,556</td></tr><tr><td>Eastern Germany:</td><td>578</td></tr><tr><td>Singles under 45 years:</td><td>1,022</td></tr><tr><td>Western Germany:</td><td>826</td></tr><tr><td>Eastern Germany:</td><td>196</td></tr></table>	Total:	3,602	Western Germany:	2,935	Eastern Germany:	667	16 to 65 year-olds:	3,134	Western Germany:	2,556	Eastern Germany:	578	Singles under 45 years:	1,022	Western Germany:	826	Eastern Germany:	196
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Survey period:	September 2003 to December 2003																		
Field work and statistical analysis:	forsa. Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen mbH, Berlin/Dortmund																		
Concept development, analysis and reporting:	Federal Centre for Health Education, Cologne, Unit 2-25, Gerhard Christiansen and Jürgen Töppich																		

## Information behaviour

The repeat surveys of the "Public Awareness of AIDS" study regularly examine information behaviour regarding AIDS. The aim is to observe, in the course of time, which of the various AIDS prevention media are used by the German population in order to obtain information about HIV and AIDS. These data make it possible to describe the magnitude of the proportion of the population that the key media of the AIDS education campaign reach, both in reference to the preceding twelve months and in reference to a period of three months.

The parameter investigated is the reach of the mass-media forms of AIDS education, meaning the posters of the "mach's mit" ("join in") campaign with its colourful condom motifs, the TV spots, the cinema spots, the radio spots, and advertisements relating to AIDS in newspapers, journals or illustrated magazines. Also examined is the reach of AIDS education brochures, information events and use of the Internet in connection with the subject of AIDS.

The repeat surveys conducted in 2001 and 2002 revealed that the long-term decline in the utilisation of AIDS education media had been stopped for the time being. A growing reach was again observed, especially among the mass-media offerings. This trend did not continue in 2003. The reach of most of the individual media remained unchanged. Exceptions are the "mach's mit" posters and the radio spots, both of which recorded a slight increase in the number of users in the last two repeat surveys.

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## CONTACT WITH MASS-MEDIA AIDS EDUCATION OFFERINGS

General public over 16 years of age

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<b>People having contact with posters from the "mach's mit" poster campaign</b>			
	<b>In the last 3 months</b>	<b>In the last 12 months</b>	<b>At all on some occasion</b>
2001	50	69	80
2002	51	71	82
2003	53	72	84

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<b>People having contact with TV spots</b>			
	<b>In the last 3 months</b>	<b>In the last 12 months</b>	<b>At all on some occasion</b>
2001	43	64	89
2002	44	70	90
2003	44	69	91

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<b>People having contact with advertisements in newspapers and magazines</b>			
	<b>In the last 3 months</b>	<b>In the last 12 months</b>	<b>At all on some occasion</b>
2001	39	58	81
2002	40	61	83
2003	41	62	84

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<b>People having contact with AIDS education radio spots</b>			
	<b>In the last 3 months</b>	<b>In the last 12 months</b>	<b>At all on some occasion</b>
2001	17	28	35
2002	21	32	39
2003	27	38	45

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<b>People having contact with AIDS education cinema spots</b>			
	<b>In the last 3 months</b>	<b>In the last 12 months</b>	<b>At all on some occasion</b>
2001	12	23	46
2002	11	24	51
2003	11	24	51

Figures in percent

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

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The greatest reach was achieved by the mass-media AIDS education offerings, above all the "mach's mit" posters (69% per year) and the TV spots (64% per year); these were followed by advertisements (62% per year), radio spots (38% per year) and cinema spots (24% per year). The multimedia strategy used for the AIDS education campaign, whereby the population has several, simultaneous AIDS information options at its disposal at all times, leads to a situation where, in 2003, a total of 77 percent of the general public over the age of 16 years utilised at least one of these mass media offerings of AIDS education in a period of three months. A figure of 91 percent was achieved within a period of twelve months.

A lower reach is recorded for the media that are normally not used on a regular basis, but are intended to cover the demand for intensive information, such as brochures, information events and, for some years now, also the AIDS education information offered on the Internet.

26 percent of the general public utilised one of these three education media at least once in 2003, 9 percent in the last three months. It is interesting to note that two-thirds (63%) of the general public have informed themselves more intensively about AIDS by means of one of these education media at some time in their lives.

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## **CONTACT WITH OFFERINGS OF INTENSIVE AIDS EDUCATION**

General public over 16 years of age

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<b>People having contact with AIDS education brochures</b>			
	<b>In the last 3 months</b>	<b>In the last 12 months</b>	<b>At all on some occasion</b>
2001	7	23	54
2002	8	21	52
2003	7	22	56

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<b>People attending lectures or information events</b>			
	<b>In the last 3 months</b>	<b>In the last 12 months</b>	<b>At all on some occasion</b>
2001	2	6	21
2002	3	6	24
2003	2	6	27

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<b>People obtaining information on AIDS via the Internet</b>			
	<b>In the last 3 months</b>	<b>In the last 12 months</b>	<b>At all on some occasion</b>
2001	1	3	5
2002	3	5	7
2003	2	4	7

Figures in percent

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

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The media providing more intensive information on AIDS are used with above-average frequency by subgroups of the population that are particularly important for AIDS prevention - singles below the age of 45 and young people between the ages of 16 and 20. This is particularly true of information events and the Internet. In 2003, there was a noticeable decline in the utilisation of AIDS education brochures among the younger target groups, especially young people between the ages of 16 and 20.

The mass media used with above-average frequency by the younger age groups are the "mach's mit" posters and the cinema spots.

There is no difference between men and women in terms of their AIDS-related information behaviour.

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## AIDS EDUCATION AMONG YOUNGER TARGET GROUPS

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	16 to 44 year-old singles		16 to 20 year-olds	
	In the last 3 months	In the last 12 months	In the last 3 months	In the last 12 months
<b>People having contact with ...</b>				
Posters from the "mach's mit" poster campaign	73	88	81	92
TV spots	56	75	59	82
Advertisements in newspapers and magazines	40	63	39	61
Radio spots	27	36	27	33
Cinema spots	23	47	30	52
Brochures	6	21	9	32
Information events	6	17	15	39
AIDS education on the Internet	3	8	6	14

Figures in percent

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Source: BZgA - Representative survey "Public Awareness of AIDS 2003", conducted by forsa. Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen, Berlin/Dortmund

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## Interest in information on AIDS

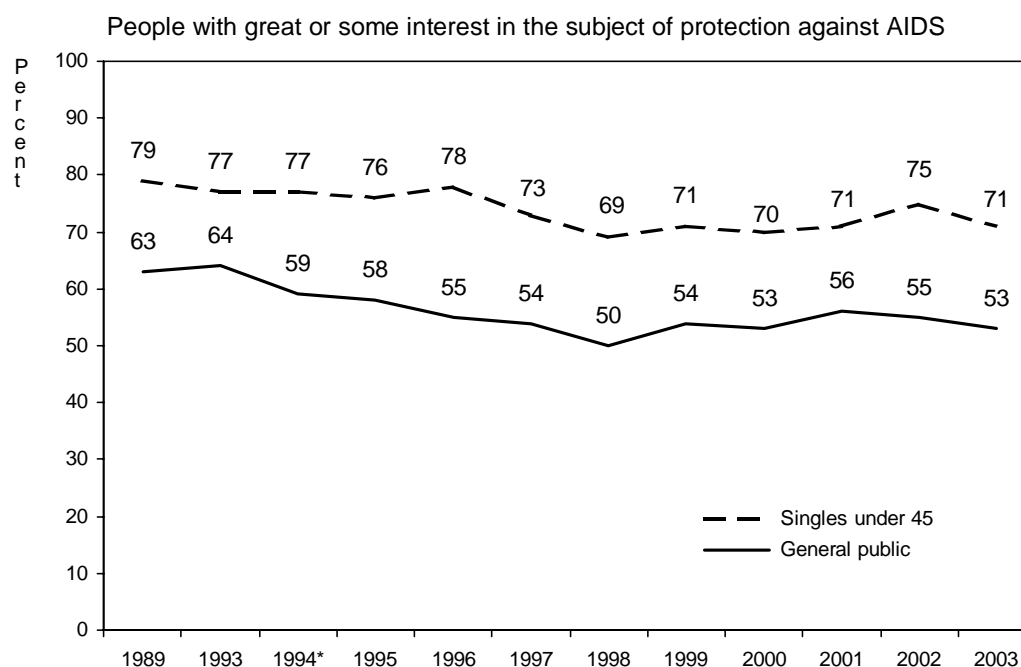
There is still substantial interest in information on AIDS among the population at the moment. This also applies to information on the options for protection against HIV infection. The groups of the population that continue to show relatively great interest are, above all, those that are of particular importance for the prevention of HIV infections: for instance, 71 percent of 16 to 44 year-old singles would currently like to continue receiving education on how they can protect themselves against the HI virus in future. Roughly half the general public (53%) is interested in information regarding protection against AIDS.

The majority of the general public is also still interested in other topics relating to AIDS: 85 percent would like to hear about medical research into the disease, while 64 percent are interested in the living situation of people with HIV and AIDS.

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## INTEREST IN INFORMATION ON PROTECTION AGAINST AIDS

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\* Including the new Federal Länder from 1994

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

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## Information level

Shortly after the start of the AIDS education campaign, the level of AIDS-related knowledge among the general public reached very high figures, which have been maintained up to this day. Virtually the entire population possesses the basic knowledge necessary for protection against AIDS. For example, 99 percent see unprotected sex as involving a potential risk of infection. 99 percent are aware that intravenous drug use entails an infection risk, and 99 percent are likewise familiar with the general risk of blood-to-blood contact. Equally widespread is the knowledge that is a prerequisite for living together with people with HIV and AIDS: 97 percent see no risk of infection in shaking hands with an AIDS patient; 96 percent see no risk in sharing their workplace with people with HIV.

These results do not, however, mean that all the possibilities for spreading preventive knowledge have been exhausted; after all, the level of information regarding specific items of knowledge in connection with HIV infection is comparatively low. Slightly more than three-quarters of the general public know that HIV can be transmitted even before the development of full-blown AIDS; likewise, three-quarters are aware of the meaning of a positive result of an HIV antibody test, and equally many know that people infected with HIV cannot be recognised by externally visible signs. The level of information regarding these specific items of knowledge is slightly higher among the younger age groups from 16 to 29 years of age.

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## KNOWLEDGE OF TRANSMISSION ROUTES

General public over 16 years of age

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	1987	1988	1995	2001	2002	2003
<b>People who say a risk of infection exists if ...</b>						
You have unprotected sex with unknown partners	96	98	98	99	100	99
Blood from someone infected with HIV gets into an open wound	97	98	98	98	99	99
Someone takes heroin or similar drugs with a needle previously used by other drug addicts	-	-	99	98	99	99
<b>People who say no risk of infection exists if ...</b>						
You shake hands with an AIDS patient	95	96	97	97	97	97
You share a workplace with someone infected with HIV	94	94	96	95	96	96

Figures in percent

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

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## Protection against AIDS

The 2003 repeat survey indicates that the *willingness* to use condoms as protection against an HIV infection during sex is still very widespread. However, it can also be seen that positive attitudes towards the use of condoms as protection against HIV are now only spreading at a very slow rate.

91 percent of younger singles are currently willing to use condoms in new sexual relationships if the partner so requests. This general acceptance of protection against AIDS by means of condoms is supported by a number of positive attitudes towards the use of condoms. For instance, 94 percent are convinced that they know how to use condoms properly, and 87 percent consider the common brand-name condoms to be so safe that they afford protection against an HIV infection.

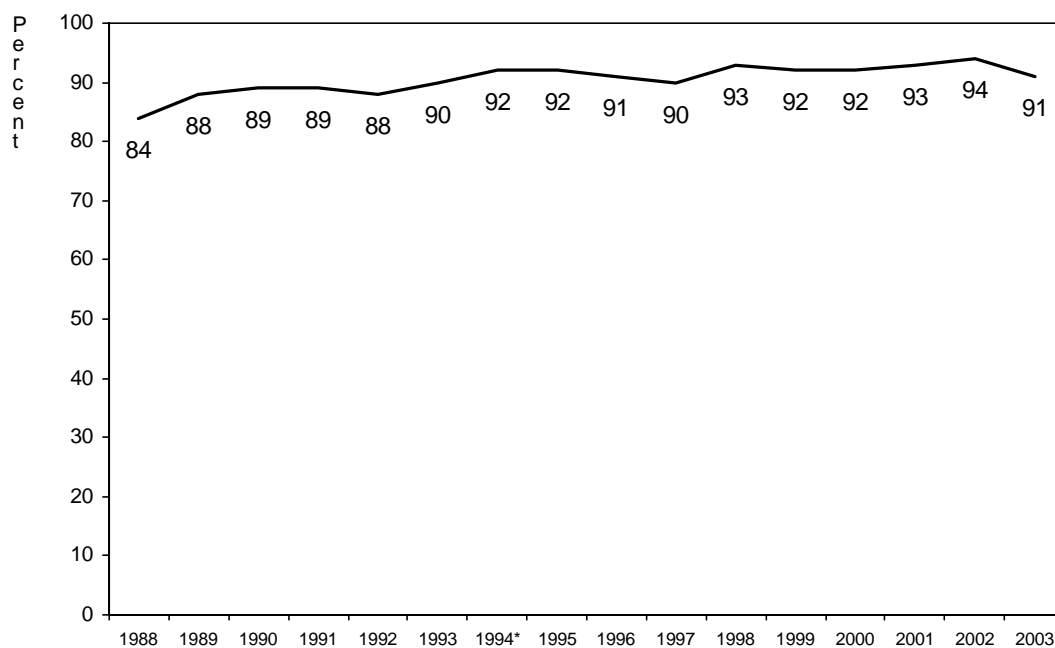
Emotional reservations regarding condoms are on the decline, albeit only slowly. In 2003, 89 percent said they had *no* physical aversion to condoms, and 68 percent did *not* find condoms emotionally disruptive.

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### ACCEPTANCE OF CONDOMS IN NEW SEXUAL CONTACTS

Singles under 45 years of age

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\* Including the new Federal Länder from 1994

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

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These attitudes contribute to two-thirds (67%) of younger singles having condoms at home or with them, thereby indicating that they are willing to protect themselves.

Seen in the long term, a substantial overall increase of 26 percentage points in condom possession can be noted since 1989. However, the greater part of this increase already occurred between 1989 and the mid-Nineties. The figure for this indicator has continued to rise since that time, but only very slowly.

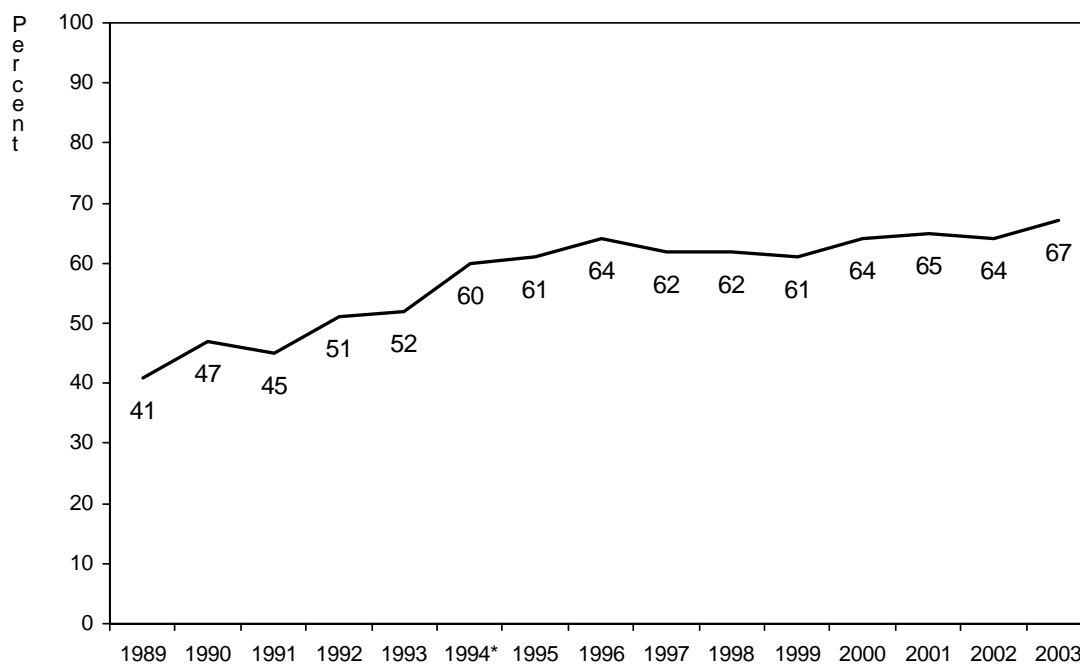
The change in the availability of condoms among younger single women is worthy of note: in 1989, 21 percent said they had condoms at home or with them. The corresponding figure among men was 57 percent, making a difference of 36 percent. In 2003, more than half (62%) of the younger single women had condoms available, the gap in relation to men now being only 8 percentage points.

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## CONDOM POSSESSION AS AN INTENTION TO PROTECT

Singles under 45 years of age

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Men	57	57	53	60	60	66	67	72	68	65	70	69	69	70	70
Women	21	35	34	40	41	53	53	54	52	56	49	59	59	56	62

\* Including the new Federal Länder from 1994

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

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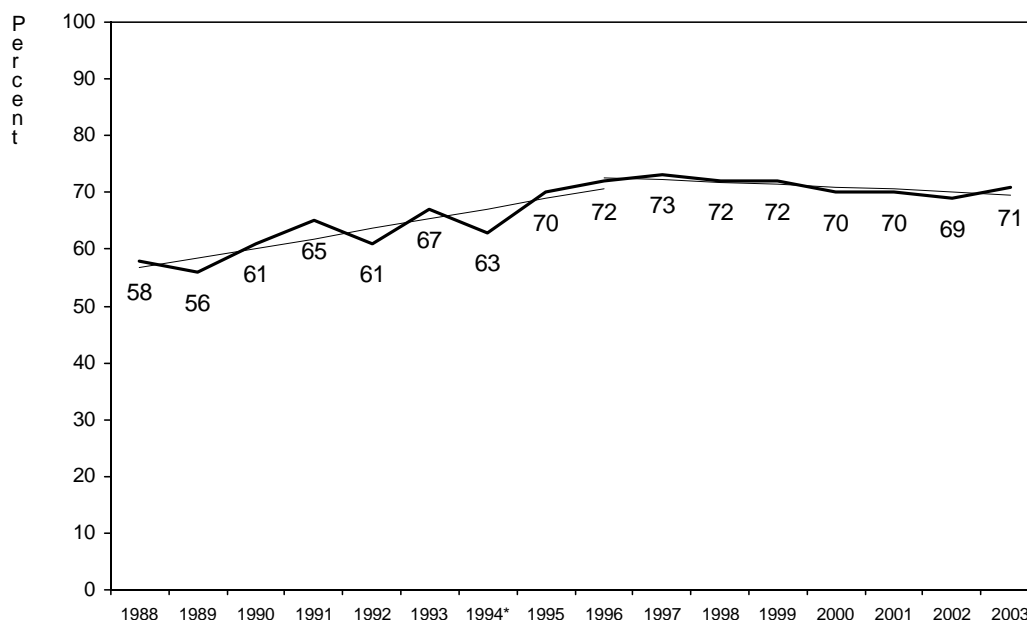
The actual use of condoms is, however, no longer increasing: it can be seen that, among the subgroups with potentially more risky lifestyles, the percentage of those who use condoms during sexual contacts has stagnated at a high level in the years since about 1996, following a rapid spread in the use of condoms in the period before 1996. Among singles under the age of 45, the general use of condoms (always, often, occasionally) even declined slightly (but statistically significantly) between 1996 and 2003. It reached a figure of 71 percent in 2003. In recent years, this value has also dropped among people with several sex partners, from 83 percent in 2001 to 78 percent in 2003. This is primarily attributable to the fact that fewer people say that they *occasionally* use condoms, because the regular use of condoms (always, often) has remained constant at about 50 percent in both of these subgroups; among the 16 to 20 year-olds, regular condom use has even risen further, reaching a value of 68 percent in 2003.

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### CONDOM USE: ALWAYS, OFTEN OR OCCASIONALLY

Singles under 45 years of age with sexual contacts in the past year

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Trend (1988-1996)

$y = 55.0 + 1.7x$   
 $t = 5.14; p = 0.001$   
 $n = 3,746$   
 Significant change  
 at  $\alpha = 0.05$

Trend (1996-2003)

$y = 73.0 - 0.4x$   
 $t = -2.80; p = 0.031$   
 $n = 4,456$   
 Significant change  
 at  $\alpha = 0.05$

\* Including the new Federal Länder from 1994

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

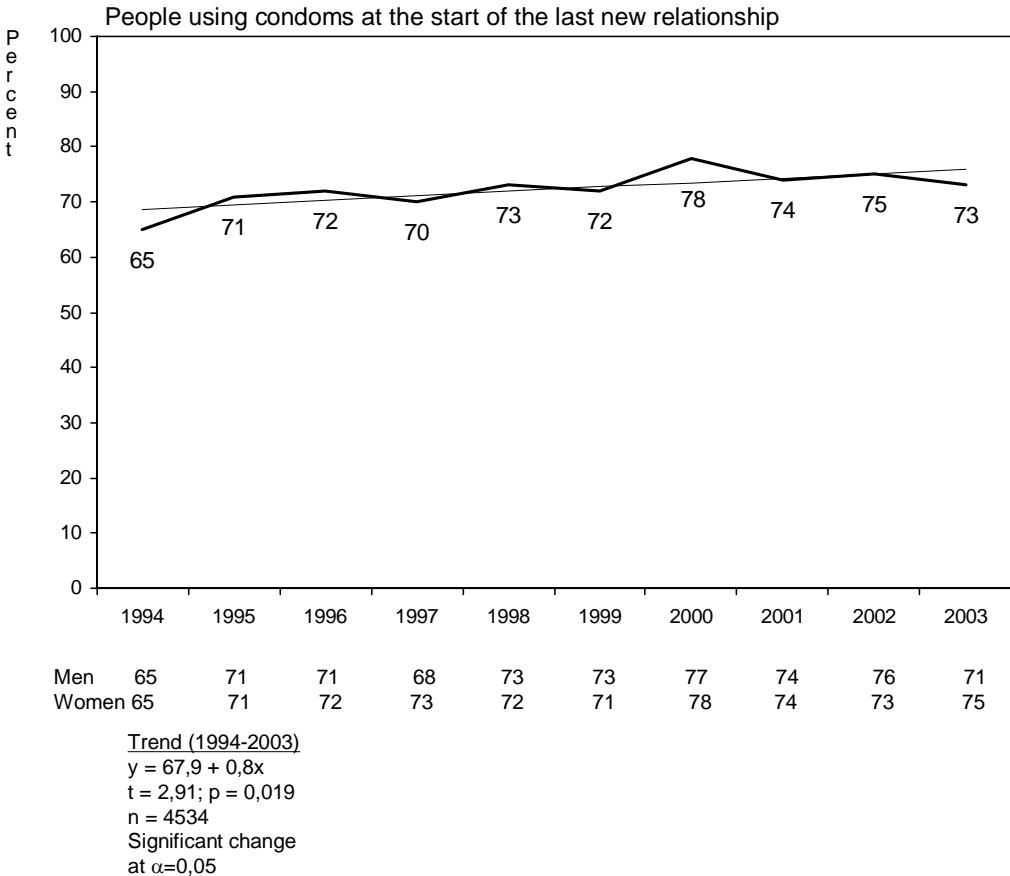
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The upward trend in protection against AIDS in risky situations initially continued beyond 1996. The values have begun to decline in recent years: when starting a new sexual relationship, 73 percent used condoms in 2003, as opposed to 78 percent in 2000. Similarly, 73 percent *always* used condoms when having sex with holiday acquaintances in 2003, compared to 79 percent in 2001. In the case of spontaneous sexual contacts with unknown partners, the proportion of people who always use condoms in this situation remained unchanged at 48 percent over the last three years. The trends in condom use illustrated here apply equally to men and women.

The decline in the use of condoms has been accompanied by a parallel fall in the sales figures of the condom manufacturers in recent years: While as many as 207 million condoms were sold in 2000, the figure dropped to 189 million in 2003.

### CONDOM USE AT THE START OF NEW RELATIONSHIPS

Respondents 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

According to the results of this study, knowledge of the new therapies for treating an HIV infection have so far had no effect on the protective behaviour of the population - partly because only 29 percent are informed about them at the moment. People who have information about the new therapeutic options protect themselves to the same extent as the uninformed, and only 1 percent of the informed respondents agreed fully with the statement "I protect myself against an HIV infection less than in the past because of the new treatment methods". 79 percent do not agree with the statement at all.

However, it is striking to note that the strict rejection of this and similar statements has declined in recent years. Instead, people are tending to become more uncertain about how to rate their own protective behaviour. As a result, the number of people who neither totally reject, nor totally accept, the statement that they protect themselves less, but rather accept it with restrictions (more yes or more no), rose from 5 percent in 2001 to 17 percent in 2003. For the statement about being less afraid of an HIV infection, the restricted responses increased from 12 percent to 23 percent, there being an increase from 10 percent to 24 percent for the statement about worrying less in the event of possibly being infected.

This shift from strict rejection to more qualified responses is an expression of the fact that a growing number of people with a knowledge of AIDS therapies are no longer certain whether they will consistently protect themselves against HIV in future. This kind of incipient change in attitude (among a well-informed subgroup of the population) can be seen as an early indicator of behavioural changes that may possibly be observed in the future.

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## IMPACT OF AIDS THERAPIES

### Perception of protective behaviour

Basis: Persons who have heard of the new AIDS therapies (2003: n = 1,098)

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		People who agree to the statement ...				
		Fully	More	More	Not at	Don't know/
		%	yes	no	all	No data
		%	%	%	%	%
I am personally less afraid of being or becoming infected with the HI virus because of the new treatment methods	2001	4	3	9	79	5
	2002	6	4	11	76	3
	2003	3	5	18	72	2
I protect myself against an HIV infection less than in the past because of the new treatment methods	2001	1	2	3	89	4
	2002	2	2	8	83	4
	2003	1	3	14	79	3
Because of the new treatment methods, I personally worry less when I think I could possibly be infected with the virus	2001	3	3	7	84	4
	2002	3	4	12	78	3
	2003	2	5	19	71	3

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

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### Attitudes towards people with HIV and AIDS

In 2003, 6 percent of the general public were of the opinion that AIDS patients should not come into contact with anyone, except medical staff or their relatives, whereas 93 percent reject the isolation of people with AIDS. This and other results of the study show that the prevailing attitude towards people with HIV and AIDS is characterised by a low level of stigmatisation and discrimination, on the one hand, and by great willingness to give social support and assistance, on the other.

The AIDS education campaign played a key role in the development of this general attitude. In 1985 - before the campaign started - more than one-third (36%) of the general population over the age of 16 in the old Federal Republic were in favour of isolating AIDS patients. This attitude changed very rapidly following the launch of the AIDS education campaign: by 1987, only 15 percent advocated isolation, and the figure of 5 per cent, around which the value has since varied only slightly, was reached in 1990.

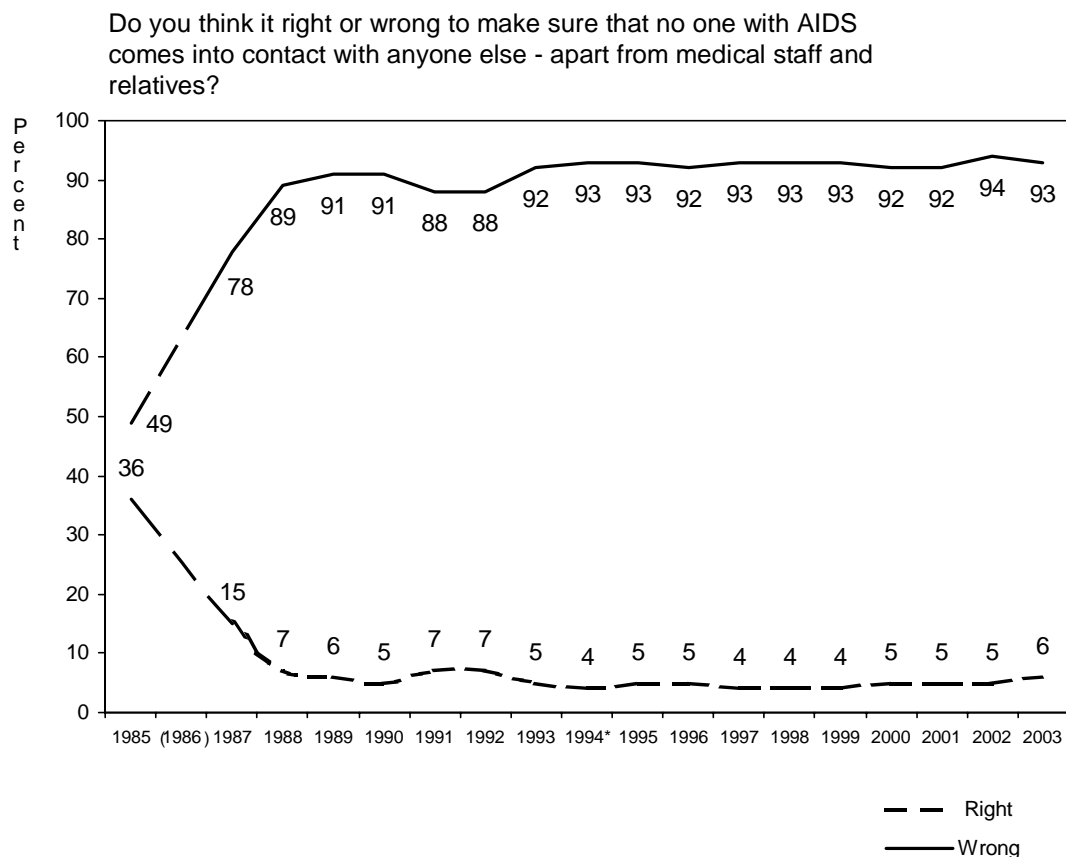
However, willingness to provide assistance was on the decline in the Nineties, falling to 59 percent by 1999. This trend was successfully halted after that time, and the proportion of the general public willing to give assistance rose again in recent years, reaching a figure of 70 percent in 2003.

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### ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE ISOLATION OF PEOPLE WITH AIDS

General public over 16 years of age

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\* Including the new Federal Länder from 1994

Source: 1985: forsa - Representative survey  
 1987 - 2003: BZgA - Representative surveys "Public Awareness of AIDS", conducted by forsa. Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen, Berlin/Dortmund

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## Summary

Almost one-hundred percent of the adult population in Germany know how they can become infected with HIV, but they are also aware of the situations in which there is no risk of infection. This high level of information of more than 90 percent was already achieved shortly after the start of the AIDS education campaign and has remained unchanged to this day.

The same applies to attitudes towards people with HIV and AIDS: soon after the launch of the AIDS education campaign, a general attitude had developed that has been characterised ever since then by a low degree of stigmatisation and discrimination, as well as great willingness to provide support and assistance. Only the willingness to provide assistance declined in the Nineties, falling to 59 percent by 1999. In recent years, the proportion of people willing to help again rose to 70 percent.

As in the past, the great majority of the population is willing to use condoms for protection during sexual contacts. This particularly applies to those subgroups of the population that are of special importance for AIDS prevention, such as younger singles (under the age of 45). 91 percent of this group are willing to use condoms in new sexual relationships, if the partner so requests. 67 percent have condoms at home or with them, thus indicating that they are equipped for protecting themselves.

Actual protective behaviour is, however, stagnating and even beginning to decline in some quarters. The incipient decline in protection against AIDS is illustrated by several indicators used in the study. Since 1996, there has, for instance, been a slight (but statistically significant) decline in the use of condoms among singles under the age of 45 (proportion who always, often or occasionally used condoms during sexual contacts in the past year); among people with several sex partners in the past year, this value fell from 83 percent in 2001 to 78 percent in 2003. A similar decline can be seen as regards the use of condoms in risky situations: 73 percent used condoms at the start of a new sexual relationship in 2003, whereas the figure was still as high as 78 percent in 2000. The decreasing use of condoms is furthermore expressed by the lower sales figures of the condom manufacturers.

There are likewise signs of a change in attitudes towards protection against AIDS. Among people with a knowledge of the options for treating HIV, there has been an increase in recent years in the proportion of respondents who are not sure whether they will consistently protect themselves against AIDS in future.

An exception to this trend towards less protection is to be found among (16 to 20 year-old) young people, among whom the proportion of *regular* condom users (always or often) continues to rise - to 68 percent in 2003. This is attributable to the fact that these young people are more extensively reached by AIDS education media, especially by a larger number of different options for obtaining information, which together enable more intensive education on protection against AIDS and ensure that the subject of AIDS remains permanently present in the awareness of the young people.





[www.gib-aids-keine-chance.de](http://www.gib-aids-keine-chance.de)



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