

Public Awareness of AIDS in the Federal Republic of Germany 2009

Knowledge, attitudes and behaviour
relating to protection against AIDS

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

Summary

May 2010

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Contents

Introduction.....	5
Details of the study: Goals and methods	6
Perception of the disease AIDS by the public	7
Communication about HIV and AIDS	8
Attitudes towards people with HIV and AIDS.....	9
Attitudes towards condoms	10
Condom possession as an intention to use protection.....	11
Condom use	12
Condom sales.....	15
Sexually transmitted infections (STIs).....	16
Information on STIs.....	17
Summary	18

Introduction

The AIDS education campaign entitled "Don't give AIDS a chance" has been informing the population of the Federal Republic of Germany about the disease AIDS and other infection risks since the mid-1980s (www.gib-aids-keine-chance.de).

The principal goal of the campaign is to prevent the further spread of HIV and AIDS. To do so, it is first necessary to achieve a high level of information among the public regarding infection risks, non-risks and possibilities for protection in connection with HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and to maintain this level in the long term. The second objective of the campaign is to help encourage both the motivation to use protection and actual protective behaviour in risky sexual situations. The third essential concern is to create and stabilise a social climate that is opposed to the stigmatisation and isolation of people with HIV and AIDS.

Since 1987, the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) has been conducting an annual study entitled "Public Awareness of AIDS" to examine whether and to what extent these goals are being achieved.

The individual issues investigated are as follows:

- Trends in the perception of HIV and AIDS by the public,
- Whether and to what extent the population is reached by the campaign's various education measures and makes use of the information offered,
- The prevailing level of knowledge necessary for preventing AIDS,
- The extent to which people protect themselves against the HI virus by using condoms - particularly including groups of the population displaying relatively risky sexual behaviour, such as 16 to 44 year-old singles or persons having several sex partners, and
- Whether people with HIV and AIDS are isolated in the population, or regarded as people in need of attention and help.

The present Summary contains important results of the repeat survey conducted at the end of 2009. Key indicators are presented in the form of trends.

Details of the study: Goals and methods

Goals: Evaluation of the AIDS education campaign by means of a long-term study of the changes in information and communication behaviour, and in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in connection with 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: 5,999 respondents)

Sample size:

	n	%	%
	unweighted	unweighted	weighted
Total	7,001	100	100
Western Germany	5,963	85	81
Eastern Germany	1,038	15	19
Men	3,198	46	48
Women	3,803	54	52
Singles under the age of 45	3,353	48	20
Men	1,771	50	56
Women	1,582	50	44
16 to 20 year-olds	2,012	29	7

Survey period: October to December 2009

Data acquisition: forsa. Gesellschaft für Sozialforschung und statistische Analysen mbH, Berlin/Dortmund

Concept development, analysis, reporting: Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA), Cologne, Section 2-25, Dr. Ursula von Räden and Jürgen Töppich

Perception of the disease AIDS by the public

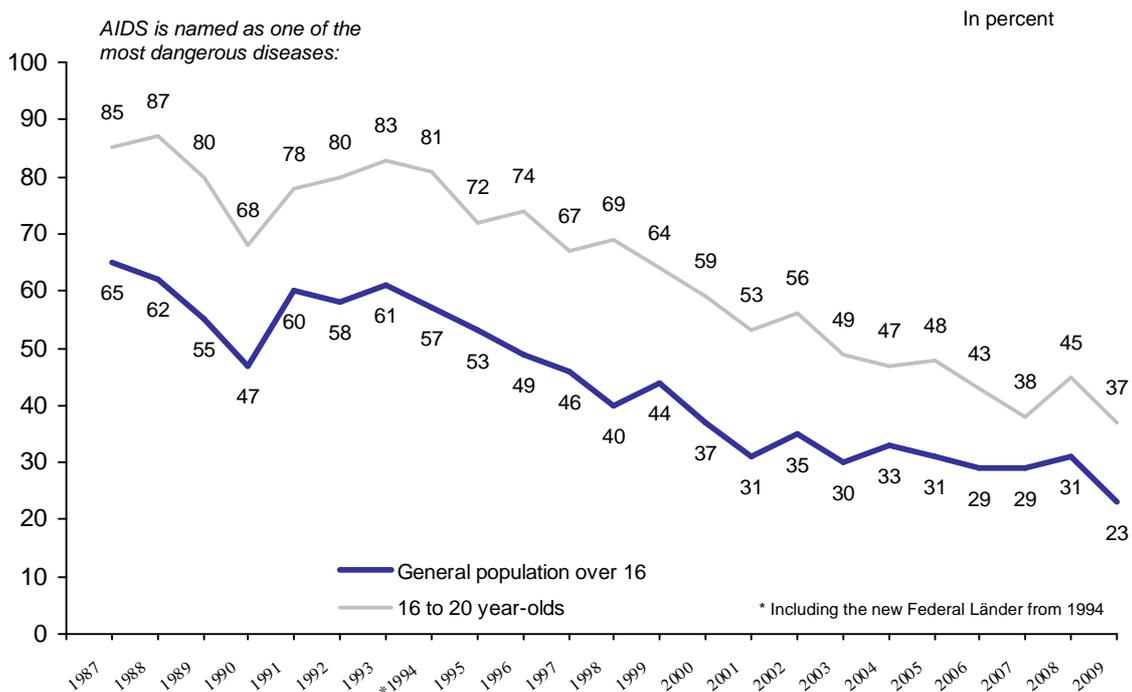
To be able to assess how firmly the subject of HIV and AIDS is rooted in the public's awareness, the study has, since 1987, consistently included an open question regarding the diseases that are perceived as being the most dangerous. In 1987, two-thirds of the general population over the age of 16 rated AIDS as one of the most dangerous diseases. In the group of 16 to 20 year-olds, this view was even expressed by as many as 85 percent. Following an initial period of shock, this estimation rapidly declined, with the result that, in 1999, less than half of the general population and two-thirds of the 16 to 20 year-olds still considered AIDS to be one of the most dangerous diseases of our day.

The increase in the number of AIDS-related deaths in the early 1990s, a continuing, high level of media interest in the subject (not least because more and more celebrities were among the victims) and the growing use of education offerings are factors that contributed to HIV/AIDS again being perceived as more dangerous.

Since 1993, however, perception of AIDS as being one of the most dangerous diseases has declined continuously. The improved options for treating AIDS and the dwindling interest of the media are two factors influencing this development. Similarly, the increasing level of knowledge regarding the risks of an HIV infection, and the steadily improving protective behaviour of the public, are further prerequisites for HIV constituting a lesser hazard potential for the great majority of the population. In 2009, roughly one-quarter of the population (23 percent) considered AIDS to be one of the most dangerous diseases. From the very beginning of the survey, 16 to 20 year-olds always perceived the disease as being more dangerous than the population as a whole, the figure in 2009 being 37 percent. Men who have sex with men (MSM) are the group most frequently affected by HIV infections in Germany. 51 percent of them today see AIDS as being one of the most dangerous diseases.

Fig. 1 Perception of the disease AIDS

General population over the age of 16 (16 to 20 year-olds)



BZgA – Representative survey "Public Awareness of AIDS 2009"

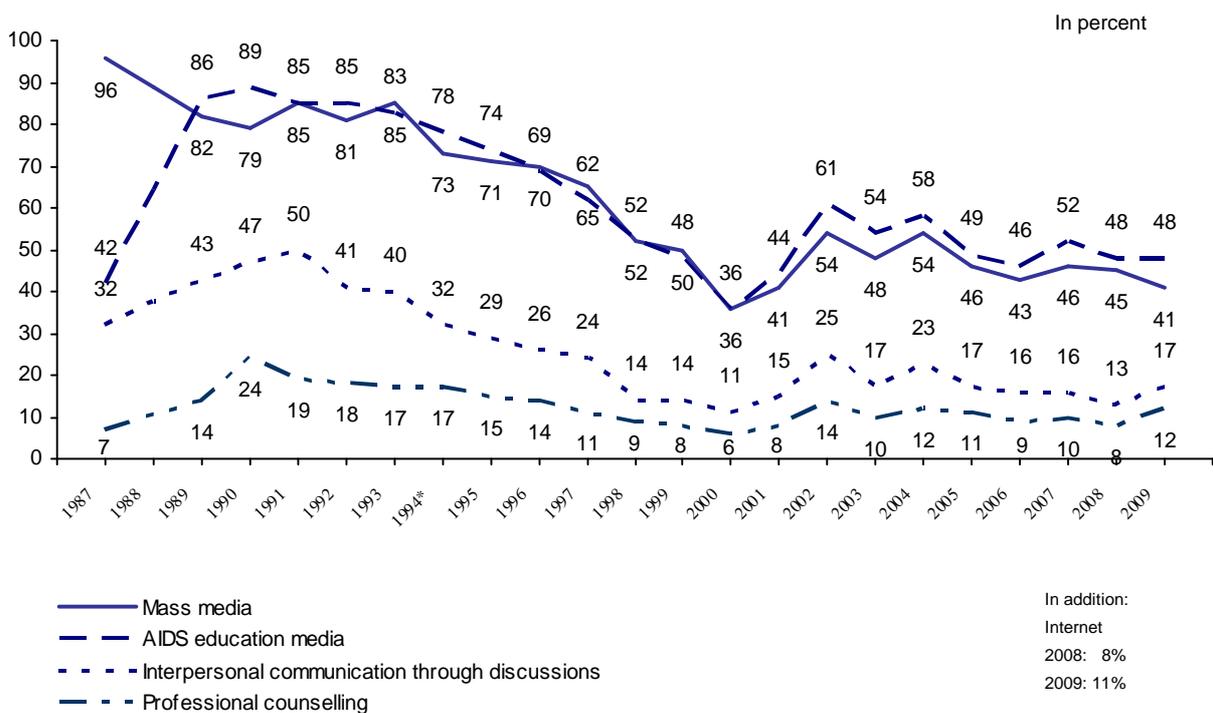
Communication about HIV and AIDS

Seen in the long term, there has been a major change in the utilisation of sources of information about HIV and AIDS. The following is a description of the development of four groups of media, comprising a total of fourteen sources of information: 1. First-generation media of the AIDS education campaign (TV spots, brochures, newspaper advertisements and information events, *excluding posters, radio spots, cinema spots, Internet*); 2. Mass media (editorial reporting on HIV/AIDS in newspapers and magazines, on television or the radio, books); 3. Interpersonal communication (discussions with the family or with friends and acquaintances), and 4. Counselling offers (doctors in private practice, public health offices and other counselling centres).

The trend has been similar for all four groups of media since 1987, albeit it at different levels. Both media-based and interpersonal communication on the subject of AIDS reached their peak in the early 1990s, declining steadily in the subsequent years up to 2000. After this time with the lowest level of media utilisation to date, there was a renewed rise in the utilisation of offerings and in communication about AIDS, the level remaining largely stable in recent years, despite a few fluctuations.

In 2009, 48 percent of the general population perceived TV spots, brochures, newspaper advertisements or information events relating to AIDS education. 41 percent, slightly fewer than in the previous year, had seen, heard or read editorial contributions of the mass media dealing with HIV and AIDS. Interpersonal communication on the subject of AIDS in discussions with relatives and friends increased again slightly in the short term: 17 percent addressed the topic in communication in their private environment; professional counselling was sought by 12 percent.

Fig. 2 Use of offers of information on HIV and AIDS
General population over the age of 16



BZgA – Representative survey “Public Awareness of AIDS 2009”

* Including the new Federal Länder from 1994

Attitudes towards people with HIV and AIDS

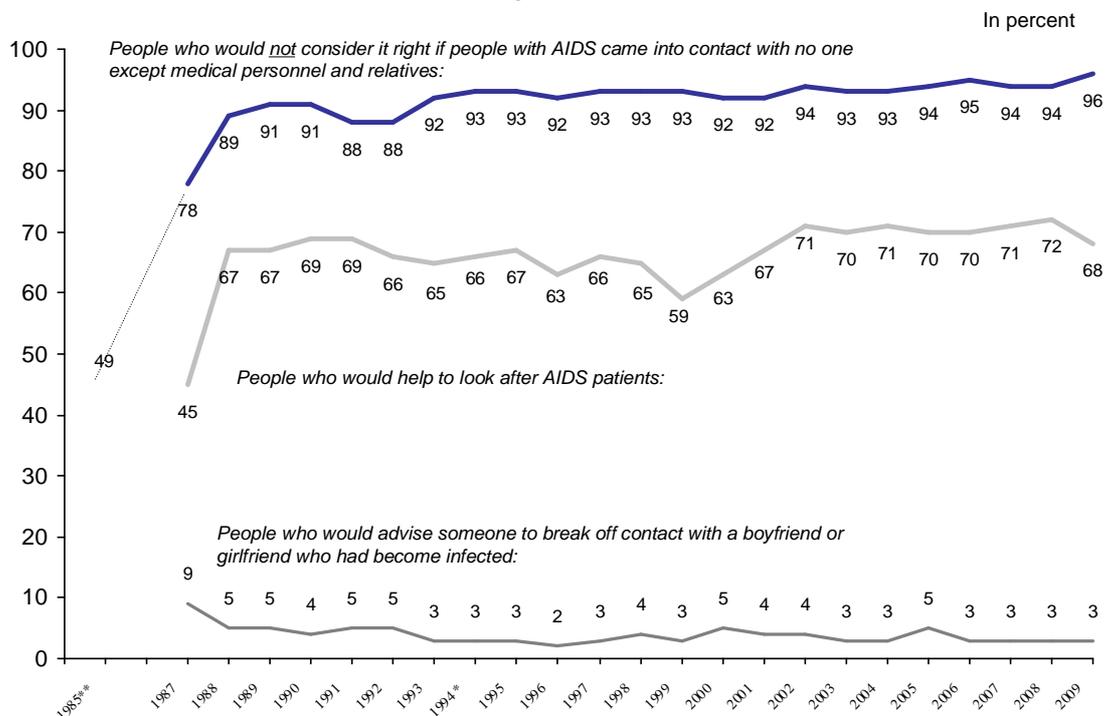
Educating the public about HIV and AIDS also serves to create and maintain a social climate that opposes the stigmatisation and isolation of people affected by HIV and AIDS.

Before the start of the AIDS education campaign in 1985, only roughly half of the general population over the age of 16 in what then constituted the Federal Republic of Germany was of the opinion that it was wrong to allow people with AIDS or an HIV infection to come into contact with no one except medical personnel or their relatives. Once AIDS education began, the attitude opposing the isolation of people with HIV and AIDS grew very rapidly: as early as 1988, 89 percent of the general population already rejected the isolation of AIDS sufferers, this figure rising to 93 percent in 1994. The public's attitudes towards people with HIV and AIDS have remained stable since that time. In 2009, 96 percent of the general population rejected the isolation of AIDS patients, and only very few people (3 percent) would advise their friends to break off contact with people with HIV and AIDS.

There was also a rapid increase in willingness to help people with HIV and AIDS, although it declined again slightly in the late 1990s. The percentage of people willing to help then rose again from 2000 onwards - in parallel with the increase in private and public communication on the subject. In 2009, 68 percent stated that they would actively help to look after people with AIDS. This figure is slightly lower than in the previous year and, as in 1998/1999, corresponds to the slight decline in perception of mass-media reporting on HIV and AIDS (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 3 Attitudes towards people with HIV and AIDS

General population over the age of 16



* Including the new Federal Länder from 1994
 ** forsa representative survey

BZgA – Representative survey “Public Awareness of AIDS 2009”

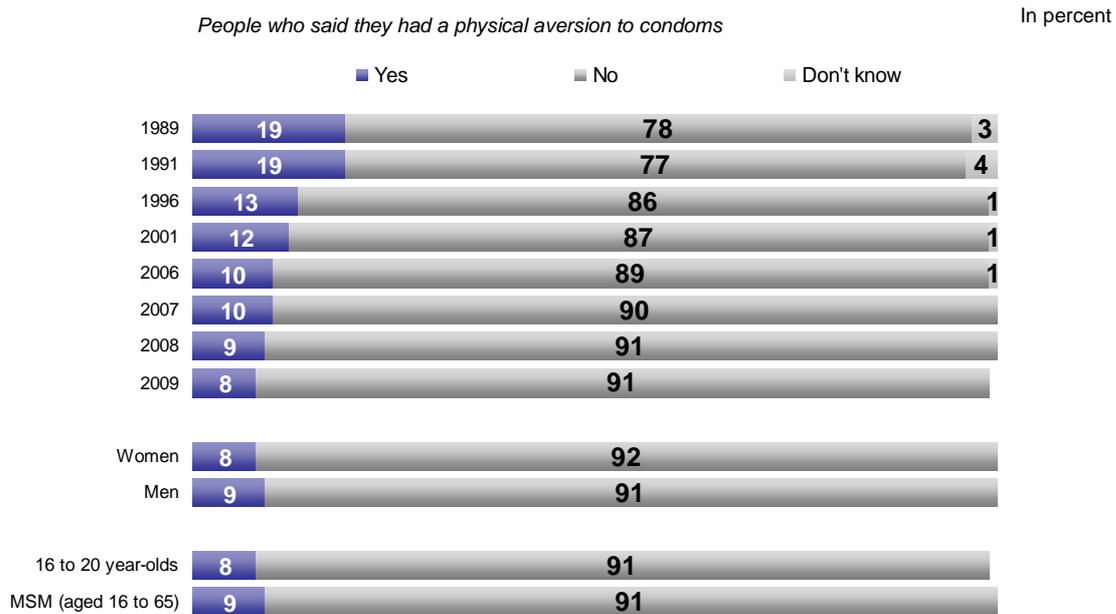
Attitudes towards condoms

The motivation to use protection is governed by various attributes of the persons, the situation and the communication between the sex partners. Essential prerequisites in this context are faith in condoms, practical knowledge regarding the handling of condoms, a basic acceptance of condoms, and their availability in the situation. Emotional reservations play a major role as regards acceptance, sometimes manifesting themselves as "physical aversion".

Since the beginning of AIDS education, the media of the BZgA have aimed at breaking taboos regarding the use of condoms and making it easier for people to use them. For example, comical TV and cinema spots were used to address reservations and anxieties in a humorous manner.

Emotional reservations as regards condoms have declined slowly, but steadily, in the course of the nationwide AIDS education campaign. The proportion of 16 to 44 year-old singles who said they had a "physical aversion" to condoms fell from 19 percent in 1989 to 8 percent in 2009. The small percentages of people expressing reservations regarding condoms are roughly comparable in the various groups: women and men, younger and older respondents, heterosexuals and MSM. This positive trend increases the probability of condoms actually being used.

Fig. 4 Attitude: physical aversion to condoms
16 to 44 year-old singles having sexual intercourse in the past 12 months



BZgA – Representative survey "Public Awareness of AIDS 2009"

Condom possession as an intention to use protection

The increase in the acceptance of condoms was also accompanied by a rapid rise in willingness to use condoms for protection. The availability of condoms presupposes the active acquisition of condoms and is thus a key indicator for the intention to actually use them in an intimate situation.

The availability of condoms is presented below, taking the group of 16 to 20 year-olds as an example. Higher numbers of partners in the younger age groups potentially lead to comparatively greater risks regarding HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Especially at the start of their sexual activities, young people have a particularly great need for education concerning HIV and STI risks, as well as for appropriate protective measures. Being the rising generation, they also constitute a central target group for prevention.

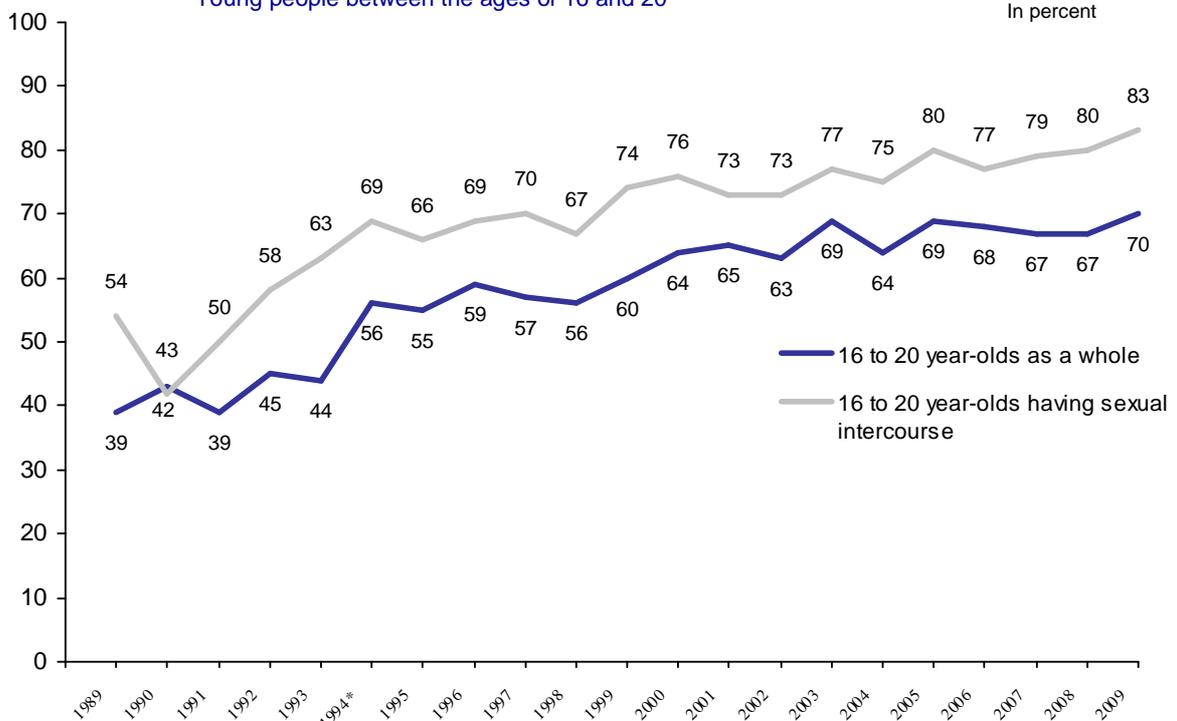
There has been a substantial increase in condom possession in this age group since 1989. While 39 percent, and thus less than half of 16 to 20 year-olds, had condoms at home or on their person in 1989, the figure of 70 percent in 2009 is the highest value recorded in the survey to date. Young people who have already had sex, more often have condoms on their person. 83 percent of them had condoms at their disposal in 2009. Specifically in this important group, one of the essential prerequisites is therefore met for people protecting themselves against HIV and other STIs.

The proportion of young people with sexual experience also rose during the same period, but to a far lesser extent: among 17 year-old females, for example, from 65 percent in 1994 to 73 percent in 2005; among 17 year-old males, from 59 percent to 66 percent (study: Youth Sexuality 2006, BZgA).

Fig. 5 Condom possession as an intention to use protection

Young people between the ages of 16 and 20

In percent



BZgA – Representative survey “Public Awareness of AIDS 2009”

* Including the new Federal Länder from 1994

Condom use

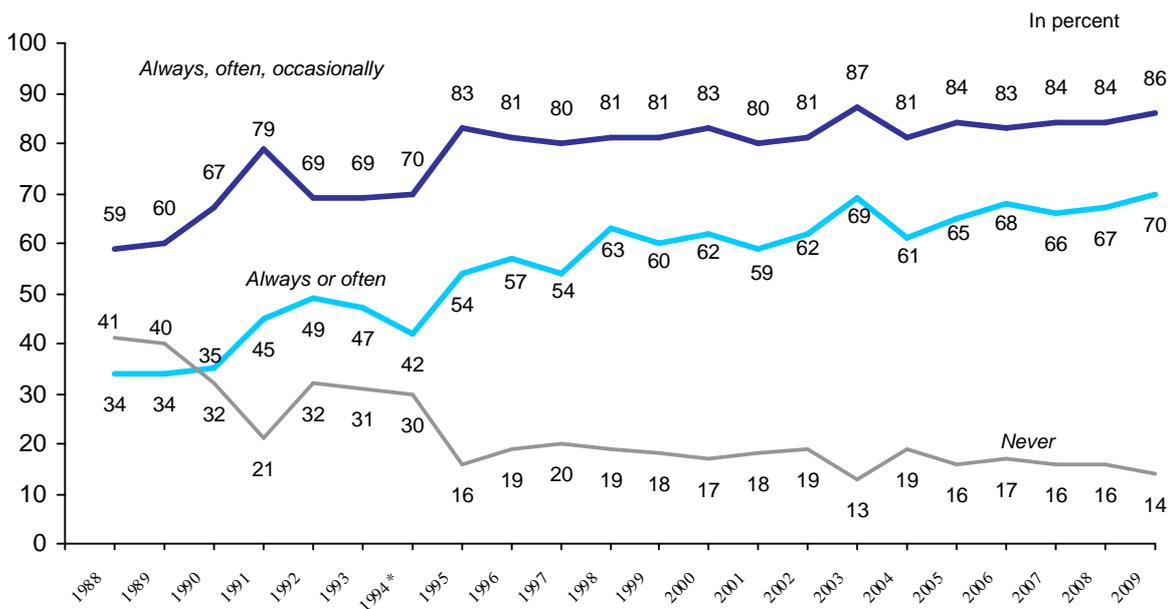
Since AIDS education began, there have been positive developments not only in the prerequisites for protection using condoms in risky sexual situations, but also in protective behaviour itself.

The long-term trend shows that regular condom use is very common, particularly in the younger sub-groups, where changes of partner are fairly frequent during phases of looking for a partner.

Particularly in recent years, there has been a further increase in regular condom use (always or often) among sexually active 16 to 20 year-olds. All in all, the proportion of people in this group who always or often use condoms has doubled, from 34 percent in 1988 to 70 percent in 2009. The figure rose from 61 percent to 70 percent between 2004 and 2009 alone.

86 percent of 16 to 20 year-olds always, often or occasionally used condoms. The proportion of young people who never use condoms fell very rapidly, from 41 percent in 1988 to 16 percent in 1995. The value has varied only slightly since then, the 2009 figure being 14 percent.

Fig. 6 Condom use among 16 to 20 year-olds
having sexual contacts in the past year



* Including the new Federal Länder from 1994

BZgA – Representative survey “Public Awareness of AIDS 2009”

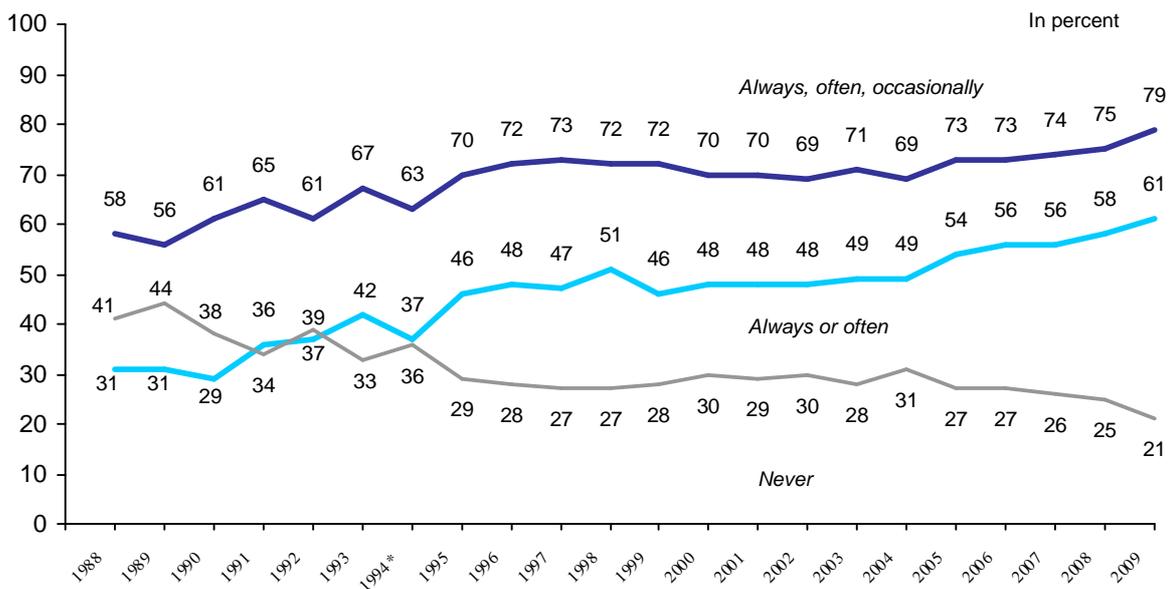
Potentially more risky sexual behaviour (more changes of partner and more frequent spontaneous sexual contacts with strangers) is more common among singles between the ages of 16 and 44 than in the general population. Because of this greater prevalence of risky behaviour, the condom use behaviour of this sub-group is examined separately.

In the first phase of the period covered by the survey - from 1988 to 1996 - this indicator value rose steadily, with slight fluctuations, from 58 percent in 1988 to 73 percent in 1997. Condom use in this sub-group then declined slightly or stagnated up to 2004. Since 2004, the proportion of people who at least occasionally use condoms has grown from 69 percent to 79 percent in 2009.

In particular, regular condom use (always or often) has again increased substantially since 2004: from 49 percent to 61 percent in 2009, the highest level in the entire period covered by the survey.

In 2009, 21 percent of 16 to 45 year-old singles stated that they had never used condoms during sexual intercourse in the recent past. This is the lowest value to date in the whole survey period, but it nevertheless indicates that potentially risky sexual behaviour continues to exist, at least in parts of this group.

Fig. 7 Condom use among singles under the age of 45
having sexual contacts in the past year



* Including the new Federal Länder from 1994

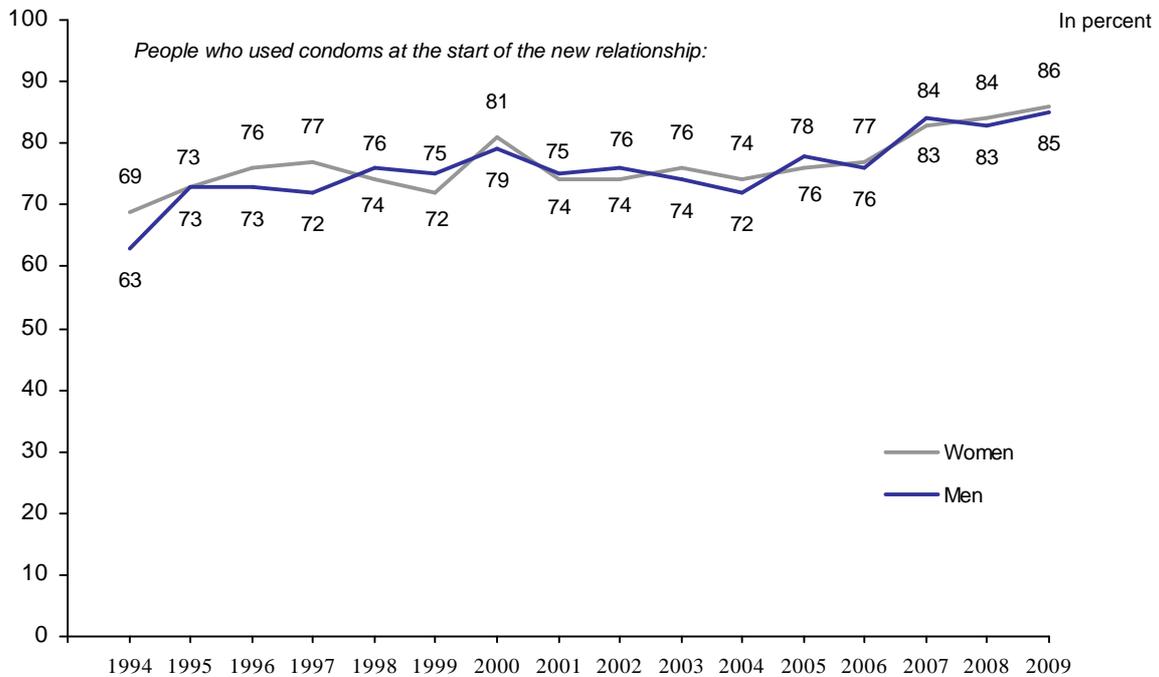
A further indicator for protective behaviour is condom use at the start of new relationships.

Of the 16 to 44 year-olds who began a new sexual partnership in the past 12 months, 63 percent of the men and 69 percent of the women stated in 1994 that they had used condoms at the start of their latest new sexual relationship. By the year 2000, the figures had risen to 81 percent for women and 79 percent for men.

A marked decline in the use of condoms at the start of new relationships was recorded in the period from 2000 to 2004. This trend coincided with a substantial decline in the reach of public communication on the subject of HIV and AIDS, and thus in the reminders given by it.

However, protective behaviour in this sub-group has shown a major increase again since 2004: from 72 percent to 85 percent among men, and from 74 percent to 86 percent among women in 2009. These are the highest figures to date for the number of respondents using condoms at the start of new sexual relationships.

Fig. 8 Condom use at the start of new relationships
16 to 44 year-old respondents having new sexual relationships in the past year



* Including the new Federal Länder from 1994

BZgA – Representative survey “Public Awareness of AIDS 2009”

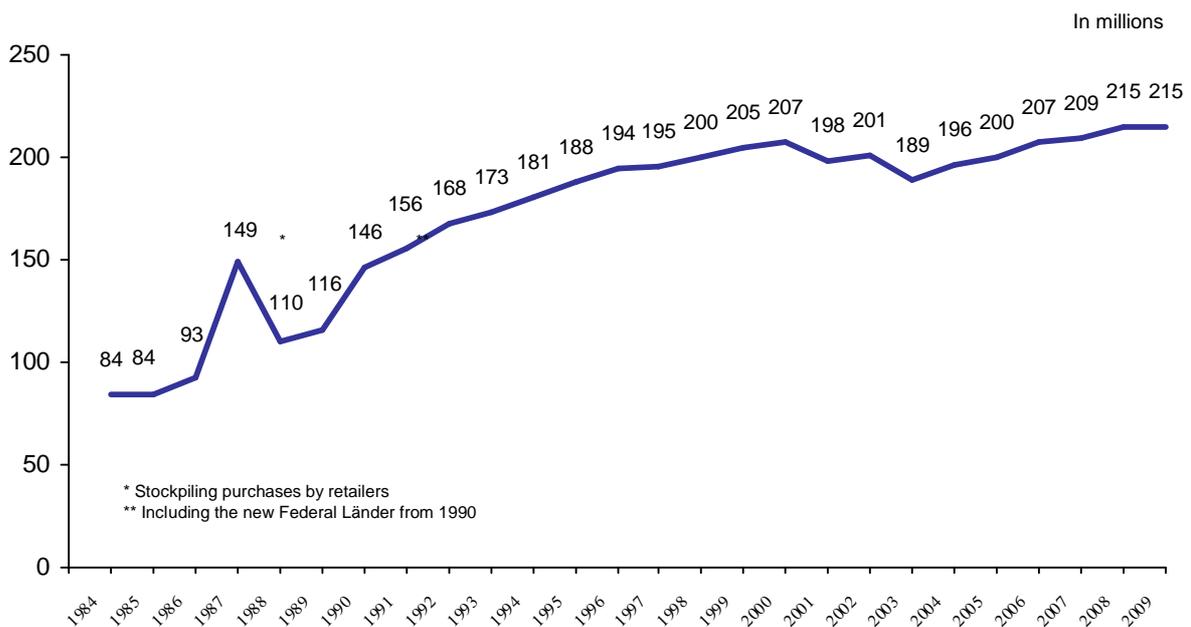
Condom sales

The trend in condom use can also be described on the basis of condom sales figures, which are collected and published by the Deutsche Latex Forschungsgemeinschaft Kondome e.V. (dlf). The members of the dlf represent approximately 85 percent of the German condom market.

The sales figures rose rapidly following the launch of the AIDS education campaign, reaching a first peak in 1987 with sales of 149 million condoms per year. This rapid, short-term increase can be interpreted as being the reaction of the retail trade to the boom in demand emerging at that time. Sales fell to 110 million in the following year, subsequently continuing to develop steadily and reaching a figure of 207 million units in 2000.

Condom sales declined to 189 million between 2001 and 2003. During this period, for example, condom use also declined slightly among 16 to 44 year-old singles in general and among those starting new sexual relationships. However, the decline in both condom use and condom sales did not continue in 2004. Sales rose to a record figure of 215 million in 2008, the same number also being sold in 2009.

Fig. 9 Condom sales



Source: Deutsche Latexforschungsgemeinschaft Kondome e.V.

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Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

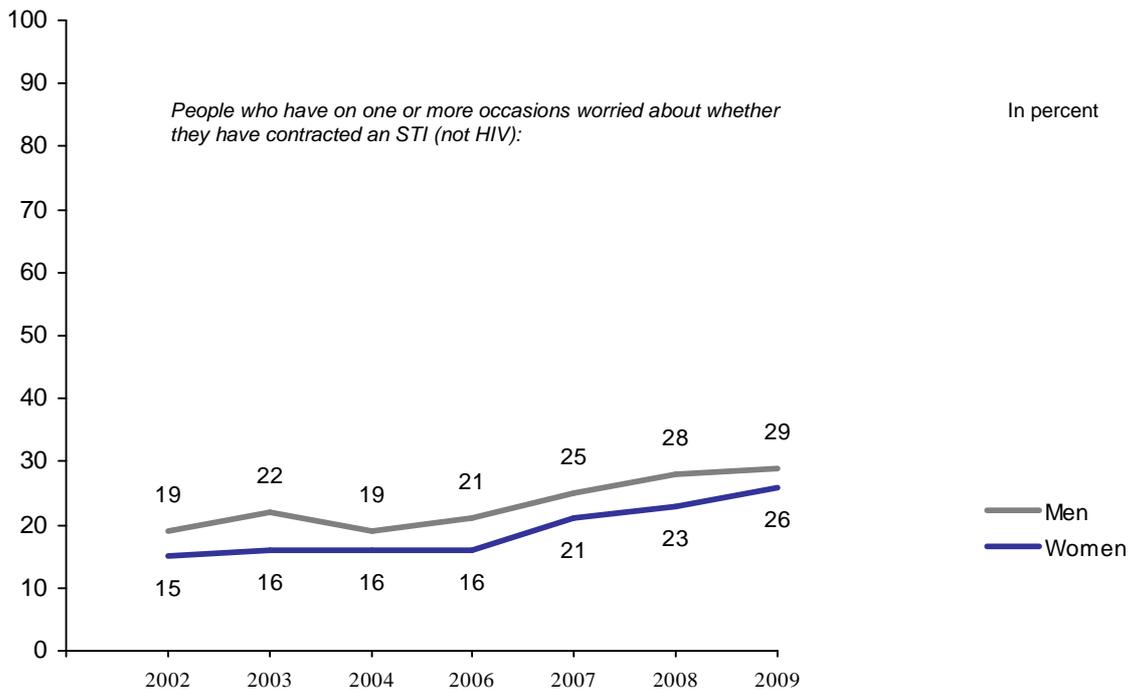
There is a close connection between HIV/AIDS prevention and education regarding infection risks and protection options in connection with other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). For many years, the repeat survey has therefore also been asking questions that indicate the public's need for information regarding other STIs and the forms of information wanted.

In 2009, slightly more than one-quarter of 16 to 65 year-olds stated that they had on some occasion been worried about possibly having contracted an STI - 29 percent of the men and 26 percent of the women. This is a marked increase in the course of time since 2002.

When this question was included in the "Public Awareness of AIDS" study for the first time in 2002, the percentages of men and women who had on some occasion been worried about STIs were almost ten percentage points lower - 19 percent among men and 15 percent among women. This trend shows that there is growing awareness of STIs among the public. Consequently, the subject is increasingly being included in prevention activities.

Fig. 10 Worries about STIs

General population between the ages of 16 and 65



BZgA – Representative survey "Public Awareness of AIDS 2009"

Information on STIs

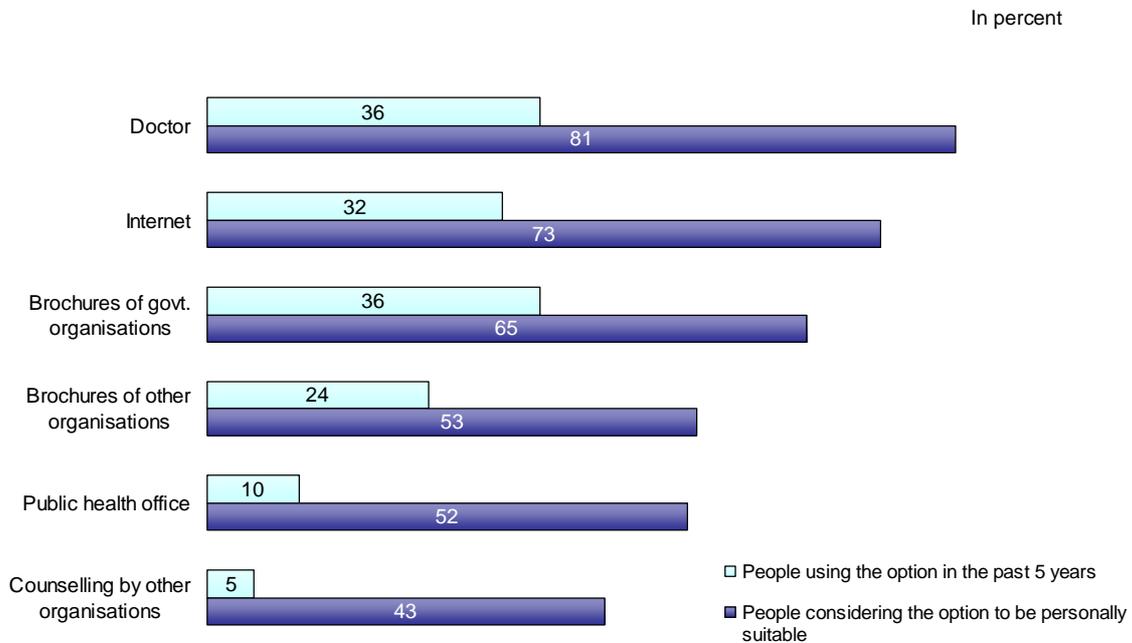
The sources so far most often used by the 16 to 65 year-old population to obtain information on sexually transmitted infections are brochures from government organisations (36 percent), talks with doctors (36 percent) and the Internet (32 percent). Brochures from other organisations are used as a source of information slightly less (24 percent). Substantially less frequent use is made of counselling on STIs at public health offices (10 percent), while counselling offers of other organisations are used even more rarely (5 percent).

In response to the question about personal preferences as regards information sources for further STI counselling, 81 percent named a personal talk with a doctor - making this the most common reply. This indicates that, for many people, an existing confidential relationship with a doctor is an important precondition for seeking medical advice and examinations relating to sexually transmitted diseases.

However, 73 percent also consider the Internet to be a suitable medium for obtaining more detailed information on STIs, followed by government brochures, which two-thirds rate as being suitable (65 percent). Roughly half of the respondents see brochures from other organisations (53 percent) and counselling at public health offices (52 percent) as being suitable options for obtaining information on STIs. 42 percent rate counselling by other organisations as being personally suitable. This shows that, while the great majority of respondents would preferably like to obtain information on STIs by talking to a doctor, many people also regard other forms of information as being suitable. In this context, the Internet is seen as having great potential as a source of information.

Fig. 11 Used and preferred options for obtaining information on STIs

General population between the ages of 16 and 65



Summary

In Germany, AIDS is nowadays far less frequently rated as being one of the most dangerous diseases than at the start of the AIDS education campaign. The improved options for treating AIDS, the dwindling interest of the media, and also the growing level of knowledge regarding the risks of an HIV infection and the associated, constantly improving protective behaviour of the general public, are the prerequisites for the great majority of the population seeing HIV as being less of a potential danger. In 2009, roughly one-quarter of the population (23 percent) considered AIDS to be one of the most dangerous diseases. The figure was still as high as 61 percent in 1993.

Seen in the long term, there has been a major change in the utilisation of sources of information about HIV/AIDS. In 2009, 48 percent of the general population over the age of 16 perceived TV spots, brochures, newspaper advertisements or information events relating to AIDS education (1990: 89 percent). 41 percent saw, heard or read editorial contributions of the mass media dealing with HIV and AIDS (1990: 79 percent). 17 percent discussed HIV and AIDS with relatives and friends (1990: 47 percent), while professional counselling was sought by 12 percent (1990: 24 percent).

The public's attitudes towards people with HIV and AIDS continue to remain stable. In 2009, 96 percent of the general population rejected the isolation of AIDS patients. In line with the decreasing perception of HIV/AIDS in the mass media, the proportion of people who would actively help to look after AIDS sufferers declined in comparison with the previous year, from 72 percent to 68 percent.

Despite the generally declining presence of HIV and AIDS in public and private communication, essential prerequisites for stable protective behaviour have established themselves among the population in the course of the nationwide AIDS education campaign. For example, emotional reservations regarding condoms have decreased slowly, but steadily. As a result, the number of 16 to 44 year-old singles who said they had a "physical aversion" to condoms dropped from 19 percent in 1989 to 8 percent in 2009.

The increasing acceptance of condoms was also accompanied by growing willingness to use condoms for protection. In 2009, 70 percent of 16 to 20 year-olds had condoms at their disposal, the figure for the sexually active members of this group being 83 percent. Consequently, the rising generation, in particular, meets an essential precondition for protection against HIV and other STIs. There has also been a further increase not only in the intention to use condoms, but also in the actual regular use of condoms (always or often) among sexually active 16 to 20 year-olds. The proportion of people who always or often used condoms rose from 61 percent to 70 percent between 2004 and 2009 alone.

In the sexually active group of singles under the age of 45, 76 percent of the respondents always or often used condoms. This is the highest percentage recorded to date in the entire period covered by the survey. In new relationships, 85 percent of men and 86 percent of women used condoms at the start of the relationship. Condom sales in 2009 matched the record level of 215 million units already achieved in 2008.

There is a close connection between HIV/AIDS prevention and education regarding other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In 2009, slightly more than one-quarter of 16 to 65 year-olds stated that they had on some occasion been worried about possibly having contracted an STI - 29 percent of the men and 26 percent of the women. The figures were almost 10 percentage points lower in 2002. This trend clearly indicates that there is growing awareness of STIs among the public. Consequently, the subject is increasingly being included in prevention activities.