

# Public Awareness of AIDS in the Federal Republic of Germany 2006

Knowledge, attitudes and behaviour  
relating to protection against AIDS

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

## Summary

September 2007

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**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, [www.bzga.de/studien](http://www.bzga.de/studien)

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## **Introduction**

Since the mid-1980s, 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 the associated infection risks. It tells people that and how they can protect themselves against infection with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Information offerings based on mass and personal communication have been specifically geared to different population groups since 1987.

The principal goals of the campaign are to prevent the further spread of HIV and to create and stabilise a social climate that opposes the stigmatisation and isolation of people with HIV and AIDS.

Since 1987, the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) has been conducting an annual survey entitled "Public Awareness of AIDS" to examine

- How the perception of AIDS by the public is changing,
- Whether HIV and AIDS are still perceived as a threat to health,
- Whether and to what extent the public is reached by the campaign's various education measures and makes use of the information offerings,
- Whether the level of knowledge required for AIDS prevention continues to be maintained,
- The extent to which people protect themselves against the HI virus by using condoms, especially population groups demonstrating relatively risky sexual behaviour, such as 16 to 44 year-old singles, and
- Whether the social climate among the public is characterised by acceptance of people with HIV and AIDS, or whether there are detectable tendencies towards their isolation.

The present summary contains the most important results of the latest survey, which was completed at the end of 2006. Key indicators are presented as medium or long-term trends.

## Details of the study: Objectives and methods

**Objectives:** 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 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: 2,561 cases).

**Sample size:**

	n	%	%
	unweighted	unweighted	weighted
Total	3,601	100	100
Western Germany	2,935	82	83
Eastern Germany	666	18	17
Men	1,539	43	49
Women	2,062	57	51
Singles under the age of 45	1,118	31	21
Men	546	36	23
Women	572	28	18
16 to 20 year-olds	395	11	7

**Survey period:** September 2006 to December 2006

**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 Rügen and Jürgen Töppich

## Perception of the disease AIDS

How firmly HIV and AIDS are still rooted in the public's awareness is regularly examined by means of the question as to whether AIDS is still perceived as being a dangerous disease. The importance of AIDS in the public's awareness has been subject to major changes since the end of the 1980s.

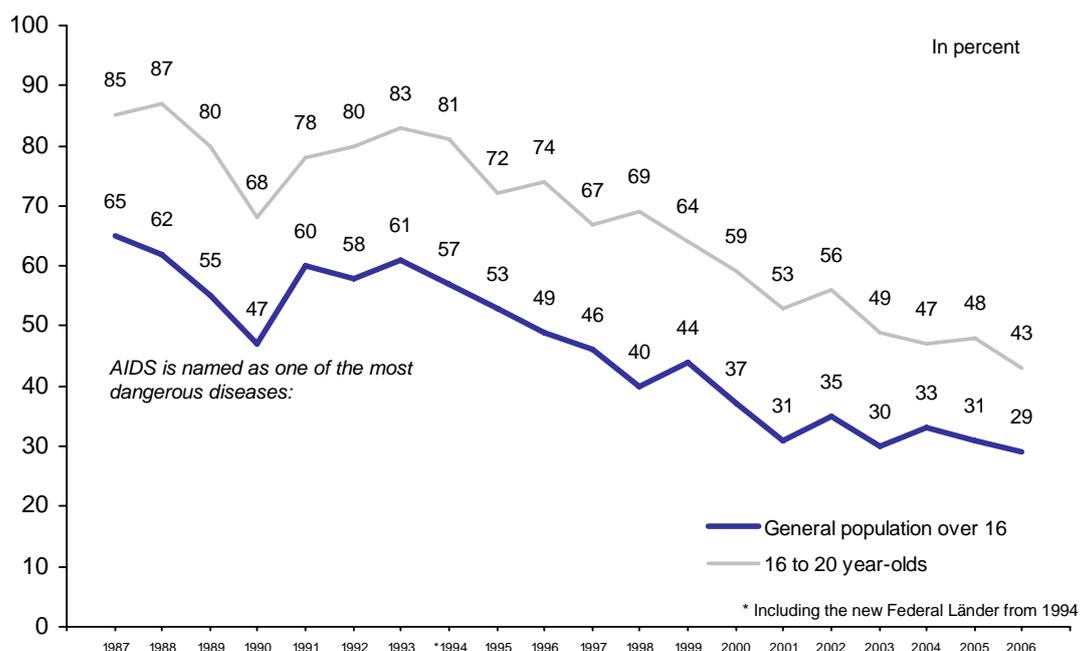
On the whole, there has been a substantial decline in perception of AIDS as being one of the most dangerous diseases. When the study began in 1987, roughly two-thirds (65 percent) of the general public over the age of 16 rated AIDS as being one of the most dangerous diseases (Fig. 1). While the feeling of being threatened by the disease declined rapidly at the start, perception of AIDS as a dangerous disease increased again in the early 1990s.

Perception of the dangerous nature of AIDS has been declining steadily since 1993. In 2006, less than one-third of the population (29 percent) considers AIDS to be one of the most dangerous diseases. For comparison, 64 percent name cancer as one of the most dangerous diseases.

Since the start of the survey, the disease AIDS has been perceived as being more dangerous by 16 to 20 year-old young people than by the older public. In 1987, 85 percent of the respondents in this age group considered AIDS to be one of the most dangerous diseases of our day. The perception of a threat has also been declining in this group up to the present. At the moment, 43 percent of young people still consider AIDS to be one of the most dangerous diseases (50 percent name cancer).

**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 2006"

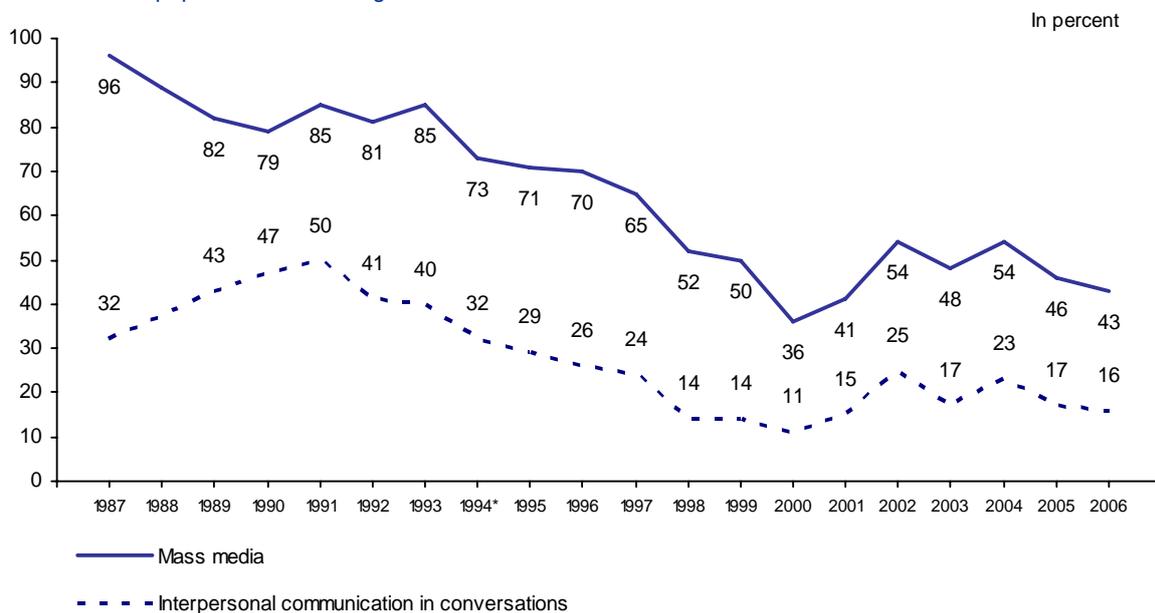
## Communication about AIDS

The long-term trend regarding public and private communication about AIDS can be presented on the basis of the development of the utilisation of information offerings from the mass media sector (editorial reporting on AIDS in newspapers and magazines, on television, on the radio or in books) and interpersonal communication (conversations with the family or in the circle of friends/acquaintances) about HIV and AIDS.

Figure 2 shows that almost the entire population (96 percent) came into contact with the subject of AIDS through the mass media in the late 1980s. The following years also saw an increase (from 32 percent in 1987 to 50 percent in 1991) in the number of people talking personally about HIV and AIDS in the family circle or with their friends and acquaintances. The number of reports on AIDS in the mass media started to decline in about 1993, this being matched by a corresponding decrease in communication about AIDS in the private sphere. Starting in about 2000, there was again a slight and brief increase in utilisation of the media as a source of information, and correspondingly in interpersonal communication on the subject. Since 2004, however, there has again been a decline both in perception of the subject in the mass media and in private communication about AIDS. In 2006, less than half of the population (43 percent) was addressed on the subject of AIDS through the mass media. Only for 16 percent were HIV and AIDS subjects for private conversations.

**Fig. 2: Utilisation of information offerings over the course of time**

General population over the age of 16



\* Including the new Federal Länder from 1994

BZgA – Representative survey "Public Awareness of AIDS 2006"

### Utilisation of media of the AIDS education campaign

One central task of the "Public Awareness of AIDS" study is to examine which AIDS prevention media reach the German public and to what extent.

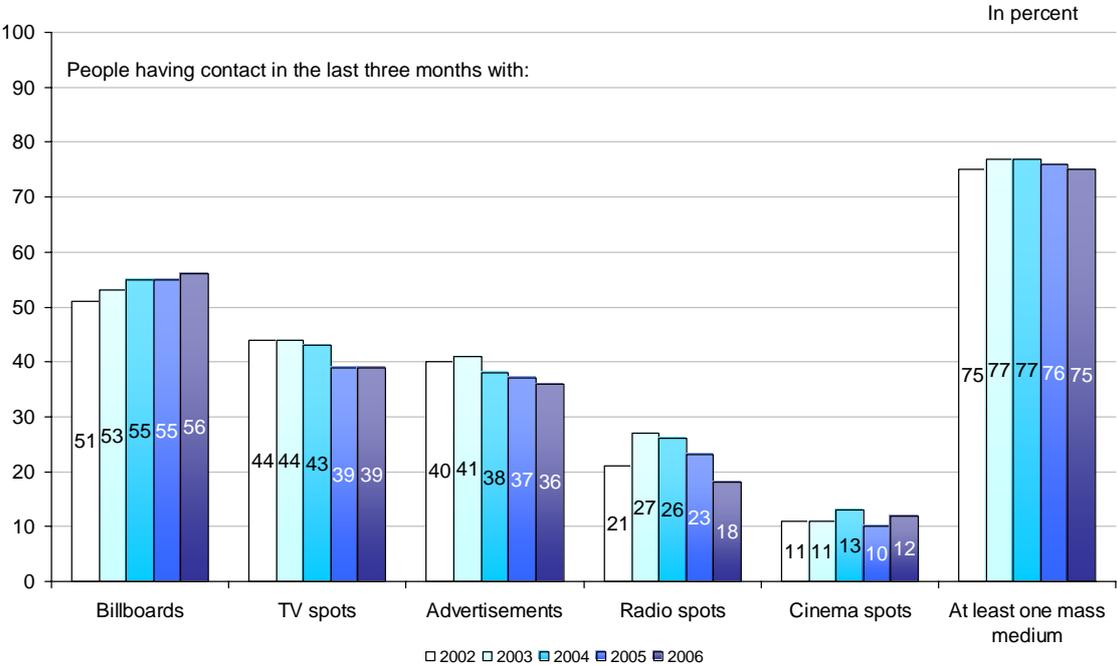
The reaches of the mass-media forms of AIDS education (referred to the last three months) are compiled in Fig. 3. This relates to the billboards of the "mach's mit" ("join in") campaign, TV, cinema and radio spots, as well as advertisements in newspapers, journals or magazines.

The greatest reach is recorded for the "mach's mit" billboards, which 56 percent of the general public over the age of 16 perceived within the three months prior to the survey. TV spots were seen by 39 percent. Advertisements succeeded in reaching 36 percent of the population, while 18 percent heard radio spots and 12 percent saw education spots in the cinema. As a result, a total of 75 percent of the population in Germany was reached by at least one of these education media.

The reach of the billboards among the general public has increased slightly over the last five years. The reaches of the other media among the general public have declined slightly or are stagnating. However, the overall reach of the mass-media AIDS education measures listed has remained roughly stable. Thus, despite the waning presence of the subject of HIV and AIDS on TV/radio and in the press, 75 percent of the population utilised at least one of the AIDS education media in the three months prior to the survey - just as many as in the year 2000.

**Fig. 3: Reaches of mass-media AIDS education**

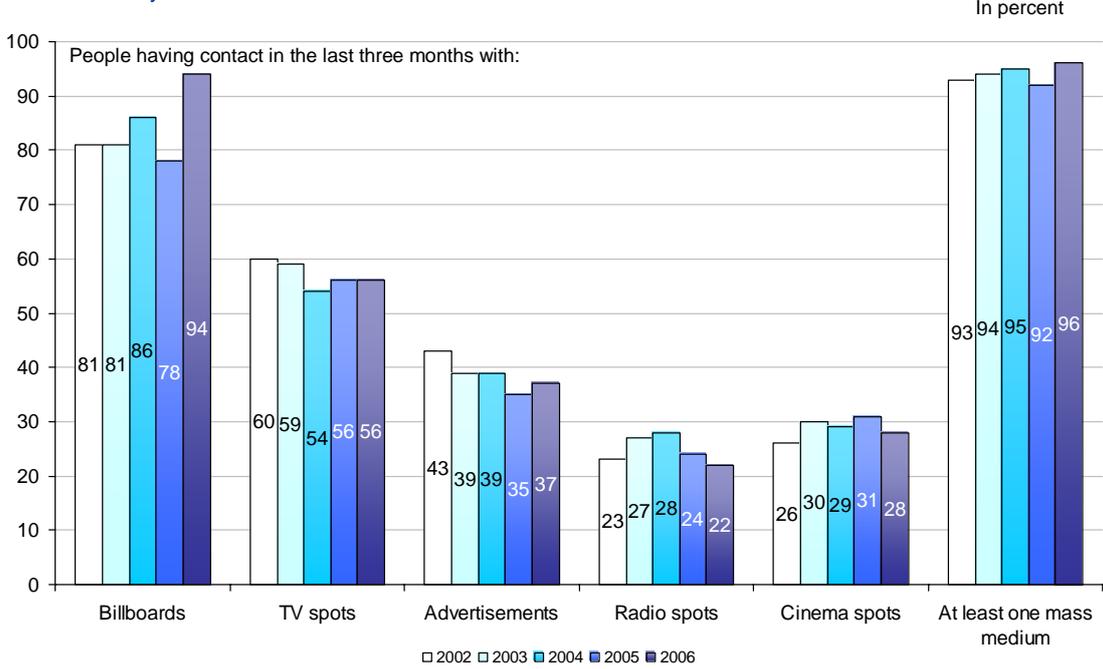
General population over the age of 16



BZgA – Representative survey "Public Awareness of AIDS 2006"

Mass-media AIDS education measures have substantially higher reaches among the group of 16 to 20 year-old young people, who are particularly important for AIDS prevention (Fig. 4). Posting the vegetable/condom motifs in 2006 made it possible to boost the reach of the billboards (in the three months prior to the survey) among 16 to 20 year-old young people from 78 percent in 2005 to 94 percent in 2006. The reaches of the audiovisual media and the advertisements remained roughly stable. In total, the proportion of 16 to 20 year-old young people in Germany reached by at least one of the BZgA's mass-communication education media in the short period of the last three months has now reached a level of 96 percent.

**Fig. 4: Reaches of mass-media AIDS education**  
16 to 20 year-olds



BZgA – Representative survey “Public Awareness of AIDS 2006”

The above-mentioned billboard series featuring vegetable/condom motifs was launched in mid-2006. By the time of the survey at the end of 2006, 46 percent of the general public and 75 percent of 16 to 20 year-old young people were already familiar with the new billboards. This new design is widely accepted. The billboards were predominantly rated as appropriate in terms of the intensity of their sexual allusions. 83 percent of the general public and 88 percent of the young people said the sexual allusions were "just right". Only 4 percent of the respondents felt that one or more of the billboards were offensive.

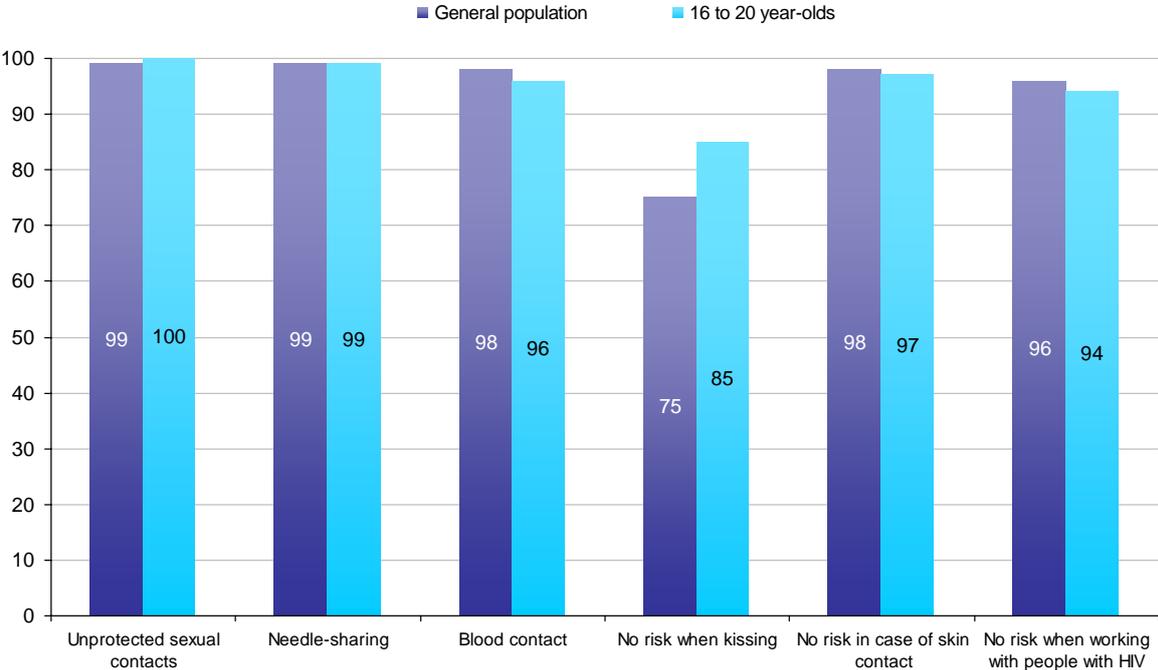
**Information status**

After the launch of the AIDS education campaign, the level of knowledge of the general public regarding the transmission routes of HIV reached a very high level that has been maintained to this day (Fig. 5). Almost the entire population has the basic knowledge required for protection against AIDS. 99 percent of the general public know that a risk of infection exists in the event of unprotected sexual contacts and intravenous drug use. Similarly, 98 percent are also aware that blood-to-blood contacts pose a risk of infection.

There is also widespread knowledge as regards the forms of contact with people with HIV or AIDS that are safe. This knowledge is an important prerequisite for living together with people with HIV and AIDS. 98 percent know that there is no risk of infection in the event of skin contact with people with HIV, and 96 percent see no risk in sharing a workplace with people with HIV. Among the general population, 75 percent of the respondents are aware of the fact that medical science virtually rules out kissing as a potential transmission route.

On the whole, the knowledge of 16 to 20 year-old young people is at the same high level as that of the population in general. More respondents (85 percent) in this age group know that kissing is not to be rated as a transmission risk.

**Fig. 5: Knowledge of transmission routes**



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## Protection against AIDS

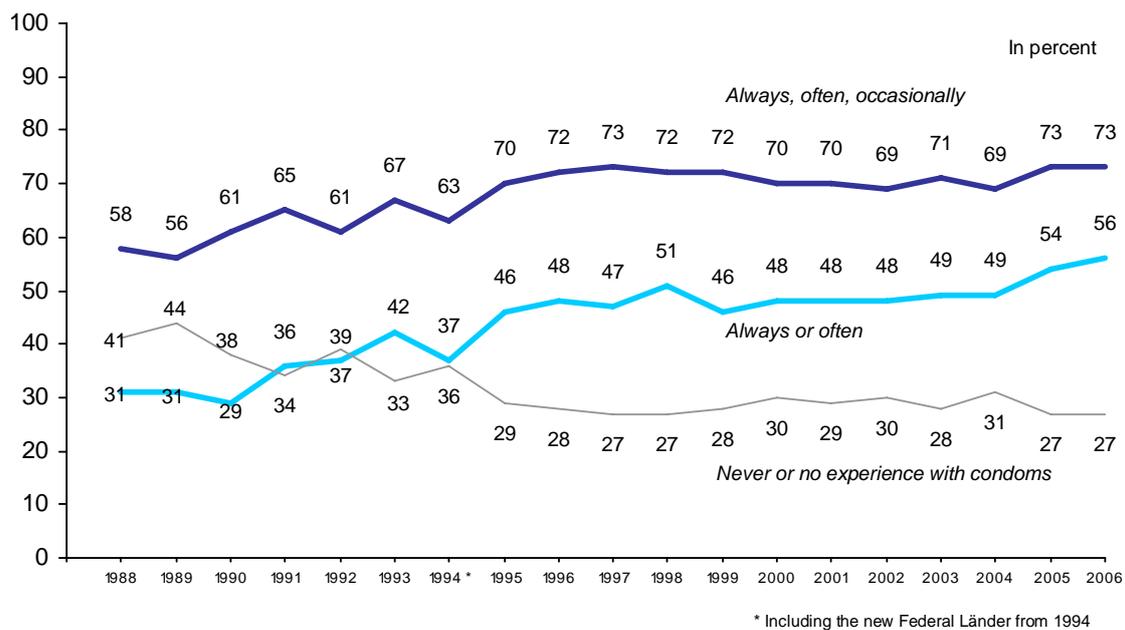
The use of condoms has spread substantially among the population of the Federal Republic of Germany since the beginning of the AIDS education campaign. Thus, while 58 percent of the respondents in the sexually active group of singles under the age of 45 used condoms in 1988, the figure had risen to 73 percent by 2006 (Fig. 6).

In particular, there has been an increase in regular condom use (always or often), which rose from 31 percent in 1988 to 56 percent in 2006. The figure for regular condom use has above all displayed a marked increase in the past two years, reaching a total of 56 percent and thus the highest level ever in the period covered by the study.

In 2006, 27 percent of the sexually active respondents who do not have a steady partner state that they never use condoms during sexual intercourse (or have never used condoms at all). Following an initial decline, this figure has been stagnating for more than ten years at just over one-quarter of this group.

**Fig. 6: Condom use among singles under the age of 45**

having sexual contacts in the past year

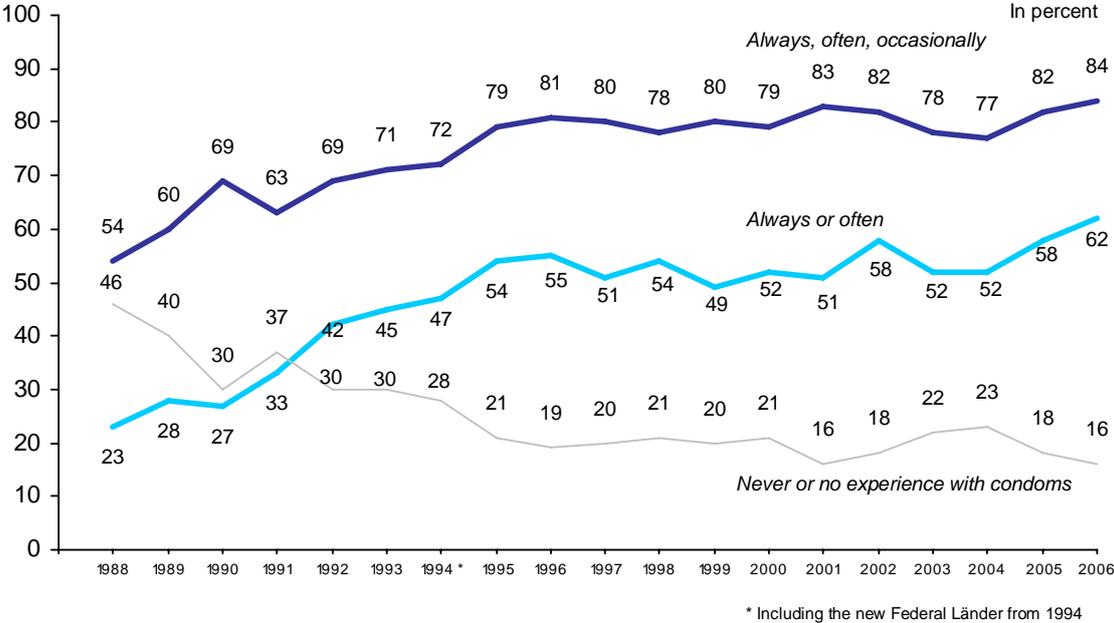


BZgA – Representative survey "Public Awareness of AIDS 2006"

The development in condom use among the group of people having several sex partners in the past 12 months is similar to that among the younger singles (Fig. 7). Here, the proportion of respondents always, often or occasionally using condoms had declined from 83 percent in 2001 to 77 percent in 2004. In the meantime, however, the proportion of condom users has again risen, to 84 percent in 2006. Within the last three years, the proportion of people using condoms regularly (often or always) increased from 52 percent to 62 percent, the highest figure to date.

In this sub-group of people displaying potentially risky sexual conduct, the percentage of persons never using condoms declined substantially over the entire period covered by the study. While the proportion of people never using condoms had been rising again since 2001, it declined to 16 percent over the last two years.

**Fig. 7: Condom use among respondents having several sex partners in the past year**

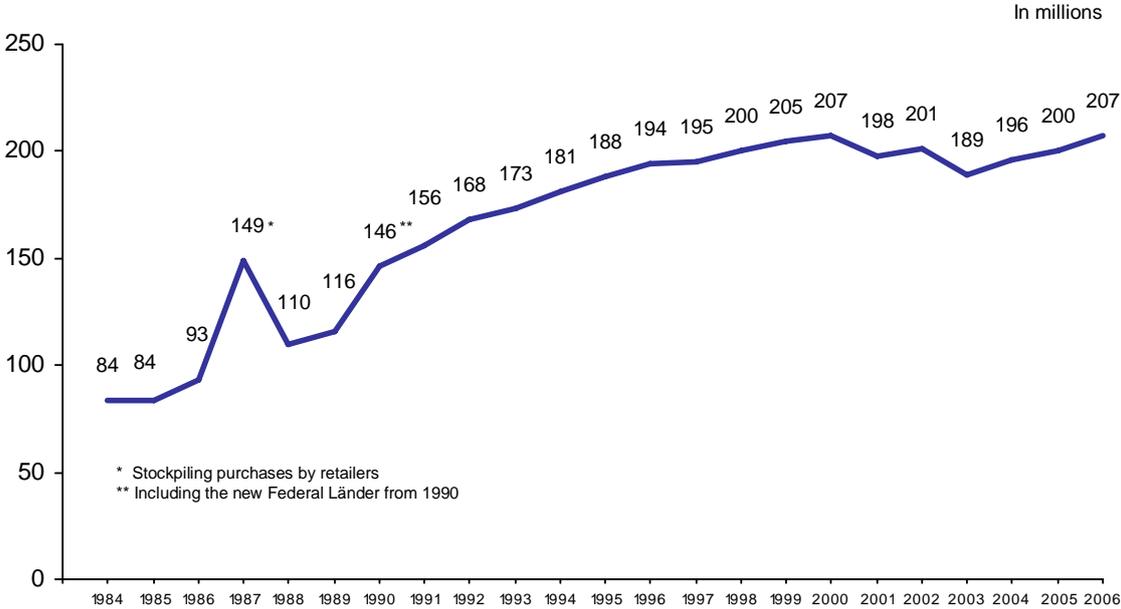


BZgA – Representative survey "Public Awareness of AIDS 2006"

The development of condom use can also be seen from external data, such as the condom sales figures collected and published by the German Latex Research Information Centre (Informationszentrum der Deutschen Latexforschung) (Fig. 8). The sales figures curve rose sharply following the start of the AIDS education campaign, reaching a first peak of 149 million in 1987, when retailers increased their stocks in response to the growth in demand at that time.

After that, condom sales grew steadily up to the year 2000, when they reached a total of 207 million. Between 2001 and 2003, the condom sales figures declined to 189 million. However, the decline did not continue in 2004 and condom sales again began to rise slightly: initially to 196 million in 2004, then to 200 million in 2005 and now, in 2006, to a total sales record of 207 million, which was last achieved in the year 2000.

**Fig. 8: Condom sales**



Source: Deutsche Latexforschungsgemeinschaft Kondome e.V.

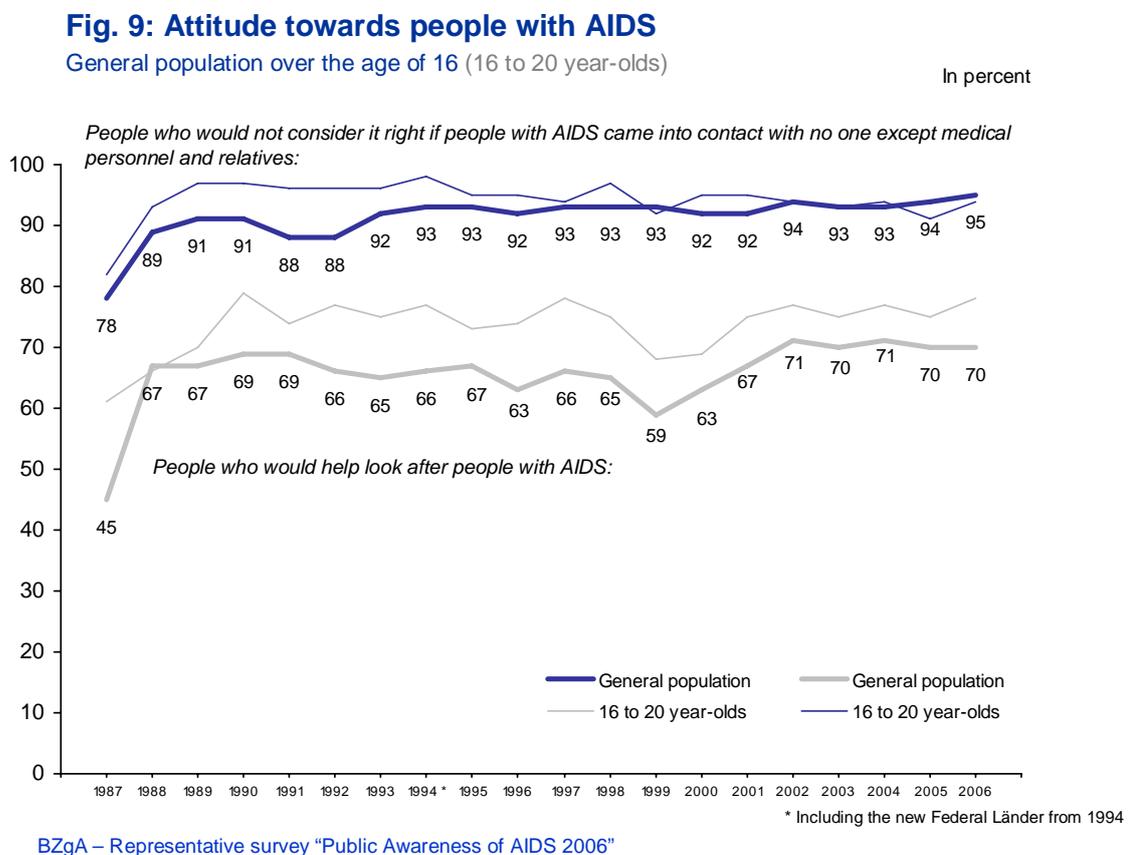
BZgA – Representative survey “Public Awareness of AIDS 2006”

## Attitudes towards people with HIV and AIDS

One major concern of the national "Don't give AIDS a chance" education campaign is to create and stabilise a social climate that opposes stigmatisation and isolation of people with HIV and AIDS, and to promote willingness to provide social support and assistance (Fig. 9).

The attitudes of the population towards people with HIV and AIDS continue to remain stable. In 2006, 95 percent of the general public again reject the isolation of AIDS patients. Only few are willing to isolate people with HIV and AIDS.

A high percentage of the population, particularly also of the young people, is willing to help look after people with AIDS.



## Summary

The perception of AIDS as one of the most dangerous diseases is continuing to decline. In 2006, less than one-third (29 percent) of the general population considers AIDS to be one of the most dangerous diseases (1987: 65 percent). Among 16 to 20 year-old young people, 43 percent of the respondents still rate AIDS as one of the most dangerous diseases of our time (1987: 85 percent).

The mass media and interpersonal communication about HIV and AIDS are less and less frequently named as a source of information. While almost the entire population (96 percent) came into contact with the subject of AIDS through the mass media in 1987, less than half of the population (43 percent) names them as a source of information in 2006. 16 percent talked about HIV and AIDS in private conversations in 2006 (1991: 50 percent).

AIDS education continues to reach the majority of the population. The reach of the billboards among the general public has risen slightly in the last five years. The reaches of the other mass-communication media (cinema, TV and radio spots) among the general public have declined slightly or are stagnating.

Mass-media AIDS education achieves substantially higher reaches among the target group of particular importance for prevention, i.e. young people. In 2006, the new vegetable/condom motifs were able to boost the reach of the billboards (in the three months prior to the survey) among 16 to 20 year-old young people from 78 percent in 2005 to 94 percent in 2006. In total, the proportion of 16 to 20 year-old young people in Germany who were reached by at least one of the BZgA's mass media in the short period of the last three months now amounts to 96 percent.

Since the start of the AIDS education campaign, the knowledge of the general public, and particularly also of 16 to 20 year-old young people, regarding the transmission routes of HIV has reached a very high level that has been maintained to this day.

The use of condoms has also spread substantially in the population of the Federal Republic of Germany. In 1988, 58 percent of the sexually active group of singles under the age of 45 used condoms, the proportion in 2006 being 73 percent. The figure for regular condom use (always or often) has risen markedly in the last two years, now reaching 56 percent and thus the highest level in the whole of the period covered by the study. The percentage of singles under the age of 45 who never use condoms has remained roughly unchanged for more than ten years. In 2006, 27 percent of the respondents not having a steady partner stated that they did not use condoms during sexual intercourse.

In 2006, 84 percent of the respondents who had several sex partners in the past year used condoms. Here, the proportion of people using condoms regularly (often or always) has risen from 52 percent to 62 percent in the last three years.

For the first time since the year 2000, condom sales in 2006 again rose to what was then a record sales total of 207 million.

Attitudes towards people with HIV and AIDS again remained stable in 2006. 95 percent of the population reject the isolation of people with HIV and AIDS.