

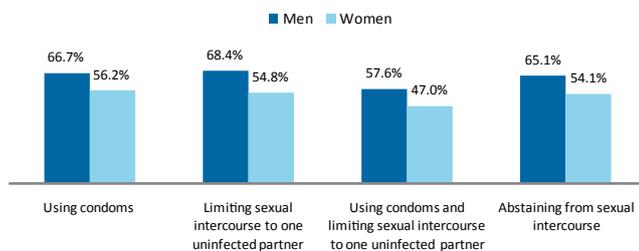


Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a virus that causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and weakens the immune system, making the body susceptible to and unable to recover from other opportunistic diseases that lead to death through these secondary infections. The predominant mode of HIV transmission is through heterosexual sexual contact, followed in magnitude by perinatal transmission, where the mother passes the virus to the child during pregnancy, delivery or breastfeeding. Other modes of transmission are through homosexual contact, infected blood and unsafe injections.

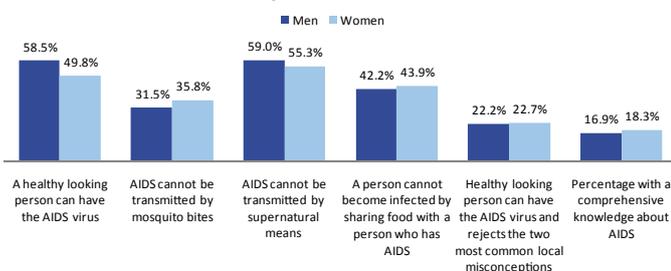
Around 73% of women and 83% of men in Nauru have some knowledge of HIV and AIDS. Given this rather low level of general knowledge of HIV/AIDS it is perhaps not surprising that more comprehensive knowledge is also very low, (fewer than one in five people aged between 15 and 49 years). Knowledge increases with age, and less than 8% of young people (15–19 years) displayed comprehensive knowledge of HIV/AIDS.

The survey results highlighted the fact that misconceptions about HIV and AIDS are widespread. For example, only around one third of respondents stated that the virus cannot be spread through mosquito bites and close to half of all respondents did not agree that AIDS cannot be transmitted through supernatural means. Likewise, knowledge of the different ways to prevent HIV/AIDS was not widespread.

Knowledge of HIV/AIDS prevention methods



Comprehensive knowledge of HIV/AIDS



Mother to child transmission

Although no data are available on how many people are aware of the risk of HIV being passed from mother to baby through pregnancy and delivery, around 40% of respondents were aware that HIV can be transmitted by breastfeeding. More women than men were aware that the risk of HIV transmission during pregnancy can be reduced through the use of retroviral drugs.

Stigma and attitudes associated with HIV and AIDS

The survey results indicate that stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS is fairly high. Although around two thirds of men and women said they would be willing to care for a family member with AIDS in their home, less than 30% of respondents said they would buy fresh vegetables from a person with the AIDS virus. Overall, only 9% of women and 6% of men expressed accepting attitudes on all four indicators.

Attitudes toward negotiating safer sex

The majority of Nauruans displayed positive attitudes toward negotiating safer sex. Most respondents (86.5% of women and 78.3% of men) agreed that a wife is justified in refusing to have sex with her husband if she knows he has a sexually transmitted infection.

Multiple partners and condom use

Young people were more likely than older respondents to have numerous sexual partners. While 34% of men and 10% of women reported having had more than 1 partner in the past 12 months, the corresponding figures for 15–24 year old males and females are much higher: 80% of young males (N=60) who reported to have had sex in the past 12 months (N=75) had multiple partners, compared to 45% of young women (N=69, out of a total of 153). Overall, only 4.6% of women and 11.3% of men reported to having had sex with more than 1 partner indicated they used a condom.

Although most people agreed that married couples should only have sex with their partner, only one quarter of women and one third of men indicated that most married men they know only had sex with their wife. Less than half of the women (48.8%) and men (39.5%) reported that most married women they knew only had sex with their husbands.

Payment for sex

Only 2% of men stated they had paid for sex in the 12 months prior to the survey. These men were all aged between 25 and 29.





Age at first sexual intercourse (15–24 year olds)

Almost 80% of men and around 65% of women had sex before they turned 18. More than twice as many men as women reported having sex before age 15. Condom use was low, with only 11% of young women and 7% of young men using a condom the first time they had sex. Young women who knew where to get condoms were more than three times more likely to use a condom the first time they had sex than those who didn't.

Premarital sex and condom use (15–24 year olds)

Almost 60% of young, unmarried men and more than 40% of young, unmarried women had sex in the 12 months prior to the survey. The use of condoms in this group was very low, with one in seven men and one in ten women using a condom the last time they had sex.

Alcohol consumption and sexual intercourse among youth

Having sex under the influence of alcohol can impair judgement, compromise power relations and increase risky sexual behaviour. Among young people aged 15–24 years, more than twice as many men (32.3%) as women (15.1%) reported having had sex while they were drunk during the 12 months preceding the survey.

HIV testing

The survey results indicate that more men (53.4%) than women (41.9%) knew where to go to get an HIV test. Only one in eight women and one in six men reported that they had ever been tested for HIV. Not all of those tested received their results, with only 10% having been tested and actually getting their results.

HIV/AIDS prevention among young people (15–24 year olds)

Most young men who had been sexually active in the 12 months prior to the survey reported having higher risk sex. Only about one in five of these men reported using a condom. Although many young people know where to get condoms, very few people actually use them.

| HIV and AIDS knowledge and prevention among young people (15–24 years old) | | |
|--|-------|-------|
| | Women | Men |
| Comprehensive knowledge of AIDS | 13.3% | 9.6% |
| Knowledge of condom source | 58.8% | 69.8% |
| Used condom during first sex | 10.7% | 7.1% |
| Percentage who had sex in past 12 months and had higher risk sex | 45.4% | 80% |
| Percentage who reported using a condom during higher risk sex | 9.8% | 16.7% |

HIV counseling and testing during pregnancy is uncommon. Only 4.4% of women indicated that they had received HIV counseling during prenatal care. Less than one in ten women who had given birth in the two years prior to the survey reported being offered an HIV test, having accepted the test and receiving the results.

Recent HIV tests among youth

Women aged 15–24 were slightly more likely (5.9%) than men of the same age (4.5%) to have been tested for HIV and to have received the results in the 12 months prior to the survey.

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

Although the survey results indicate a low incidence of confirmed STIs in the 12 months prior to the survey (2.3% of women and 1.3% of men), these results should be considered alongside the much higher prevalence of reported symptoms. Common symptoms of STIs were reported by 13.6% of women and 5.5% of men.

Policy note:

The DHS highlighted a variety of STI-, HIV- and AIDS-related issues that require urgent policy attention. Key features are a widespread lack of knowledge, coupled with many misconceptions about HIV and AIDS; a worrying number of people displaying symptoms of STIs who have not been diagnosed; and the fact that very few people have had an HIV test, with few people tested during pregnancy.

Regarding sexual behaviour and practices, people start to have sex at a young age, and young people, particularly men, are having higher risk sex. Although reasonably high numbers of youth know where to get condoms (58.8% of females and 69.8% of males), very few use them, particularly during higher risk sex (10% of females and 17% of males), and even fewer males used a condom the first time they had sex (7%, compared to 11% of females).

These low use rates, combined with the fact that 80% of males and 65% of females reported to have had their first sexual experience before turning 18, suggest urgent policy attention is required, as well as a review of the effectiveness of current HIV and AIDS education, particularly with regard to behaviour change, including more tangible impacts on safe sex practices.

*For more detailed information on HIV and AIDS see chapter 12 in the full Nauru 2007 DHS report.

