

# KAISER PUBLIC OPINION SPOTLIGHT

*Kaiser Public Opinion Spotlights provide in-depth analysis of public opinion on a variety of health care and health policy topics. Each Spotlight uses public opinion data from Kaiser surveys and other sources to examine current views and trends.*

*Updated: August 2006*

## **The Public's Knowledge and Perceptions About HIV/AIDS**

This Kaiser Public Opinion Spotlight uses data from Kaiser Family Foundation surveys and from other sources to explore the public's level of knowledge and perceptions about HIV/AIDS, including areas such as HIV transmission, prevention, and treatment, and which groups are most affected by the disease. Since the first few years of the U.S. epidemic, public knowledge about the disease has increased over time in many areas, but some significant misconceptions remain today.

In 2006, more than one-third of the public (37%) thinks HIV might be transmitted through kissing, 22% think it might be transmitted through sharing a drinking glass, and one in six (16%) think it might be transmitted through touching a toilet seat. More than four in ten adults (43%) hold at least one of these misconceptions. Misconceptions about HIV transmission are found in all segments of the population. For instance, while education does increase people's level of knowledge about transmission somewhat, still 32% of college graduates held at least one misconception about HIV is transmitted.

In addition to misconceptions about HIV transmission, many adults also hold misconceptions about HIV prevention and treatment. In 2006, more than half the public did not know that having another sexually transmitted disease can increase a person's risk of getting HIV (56%), and that a pregnant woman with HIV can take drugs to reduce the risk of her baby being infected (55%). Smaller shares did not know that there is presently no cure for HIV (14%) and that there are drugs that can lengthen the lives of people with HIV (13%).

In 2006, approximately half of new AIDS diagnoses in the U.S. are among African Americans, and the AIDS case rate among African Americans is significantly higher than for whites. Most Americans are not aware of the disproportionate impact of the HIV epidemic on African Americans. Just over a quarter say that African Americans are more likely than whites to be infected with HIV (a slightly higher share of African Americans themselves – 34% – say this is true), and only 12% name African Americans in an open-ended question about which groups are most likely to be infected (7% name minorities in general).

Treatment access is an issue even in the U.S., with the CDC reporting that about half of those who need antiretrovirals are not getting them. Americans perceive these access challenges, with seven in ten (70%) thinking that most people with HIV in the U.S. do not get access to needed medication. However, a majority (57%) believe that most people at high risk for HIV in the U.S. do have access to needed prevention services.

More than six in ten adults (61%) say that most of what they know about HIV/AIDS comes from the media, including radio, TV, and newspapers. In terms of the type of information they receive, many people say they would like to have more information about HIV/AIDS, particularly the different kinds of HIV tests available (44%), and how to protect their privacy

when getting an HIV test (40%). This is especially true for African Americans and Latinos, who are almost twice as likely as whites to say they would like more information about HIV/AIDS.

For more information about public opinion on HIV/AIDS, see:

Public Opinion on the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic  
<http://www.kff.org/spotlight/hivglobal/index.cfm>

Public Opinion on the HIV/AIDS Epidemic in the United States  
<http://www.kff.org/spotlight/hivus/index.cfm>

Attitudes About Stigma and Discrimination Related to HIV/AIDS  
<http://www.kff.org/spotlight/hivstigma/index.cfm>

The Public's Experiences with and Attitudes about HIV Testing  
<http://www.kff.org/spotlight/hivtest/index.cfm>

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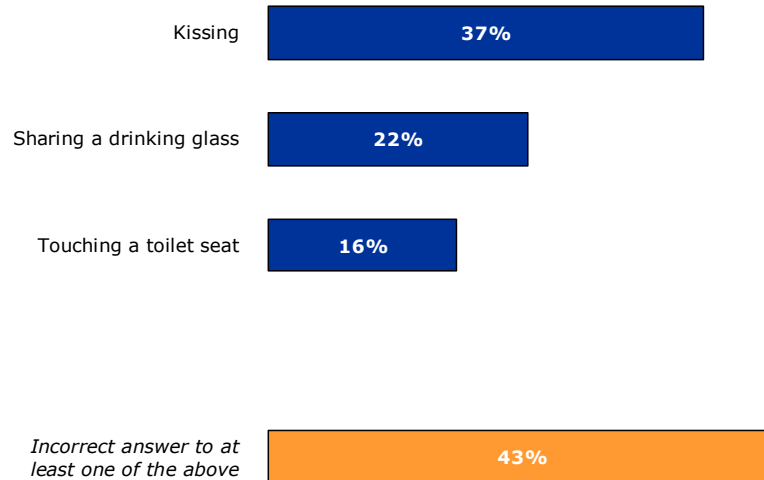
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## 1. Misconceptions About HIV Transmission

In 2006, more than one-third of the public (37%) thinks HIV might be transmitted through kissing, 22% think it might be transmitted through sharing a drinking glass, and one in six (16%) think it might be transmitted through touching a toilet seat. More than four in ten adults (43%) hold at least one of these misconceptions.

### Misconceptions About HIV Transmission

Percent who say that HIV can be transmitted in the following ways, or say they don't know...  
(Incorrect answers; Mar-06)



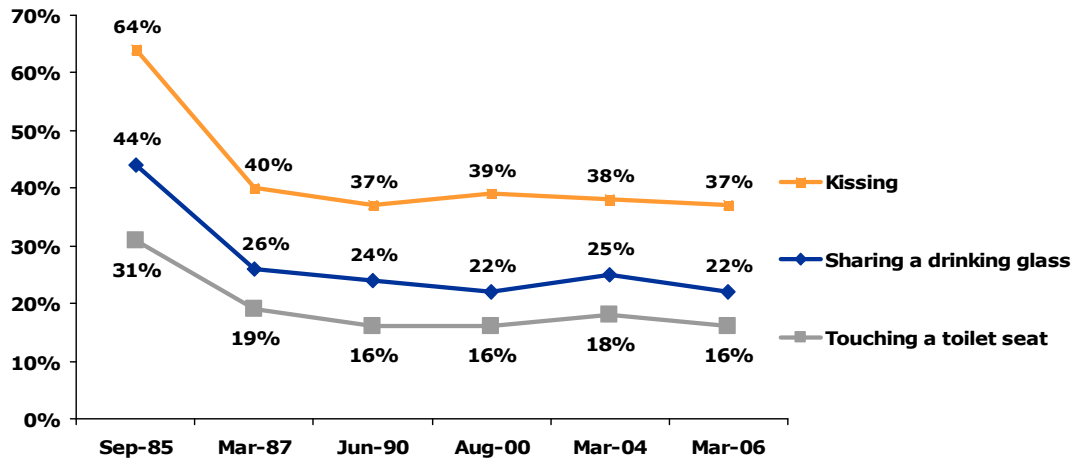
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS* (conducted March 24 – April 18, 2006)

## 2. Trends in Misconceptions About HIV Transmission

Public knowledge about the ways HIV can and cannot be spread increased dramatically from the mid-1980s through 1990, but has remained relatively stable since then. For example, the share saying HIV can be transmitted through sharing a drinking glass (or say they don't know if it can be transmitted this way) decreased from 44% in 1985 to 26% in 1987, and remains at 22% in 2006.

### Trends in Misconceptions About HIV Transmission

Percent who say that HIV can be transmitted in the following ways, or say they don't know... (Incorrect answers)



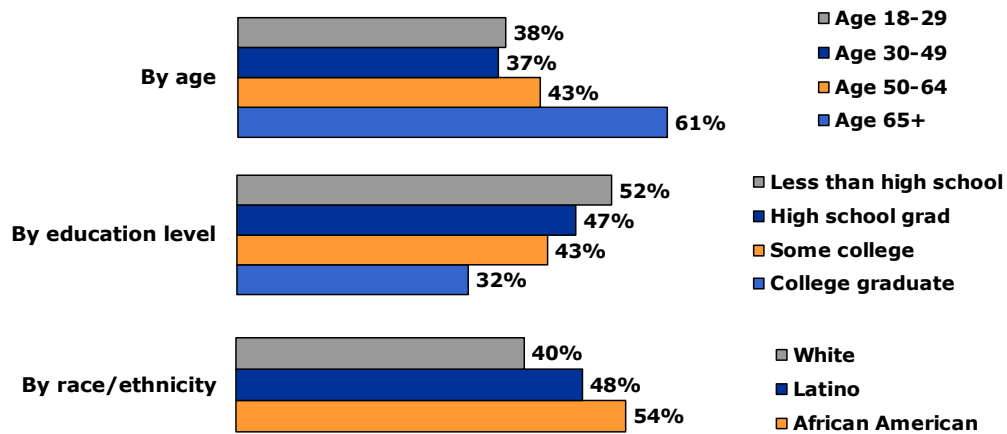
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation surveys (2000-2006); ABC News Polls (1985-1990)

### 3. Misconceptions About HIV Transmission by Age, Education, and Race/Ethnicity

Misconceptions about HIV transmission are found in all segments of the population. While education does increase people's level of knowledge about transmission somewhat, still 32% of college graduates held at least one misconception about HIV is transmitted. Similarly, people ages 65 and older are more likely than their younger counterparts to have such misconceptions, but large shares of younger people also gave incorrect answers to these questions. African Americans and Latinos are somewhat more likely than whites to answer these questions incorrectly, but still 40% of whites give incorrect answers.

#### Misconceptions About HIV Transmission by Age, Education, and Race/Ethnicity

Percent who think HIV might be transmitted through either kissing, sharing a drinking glass, or touching a toilet seat...



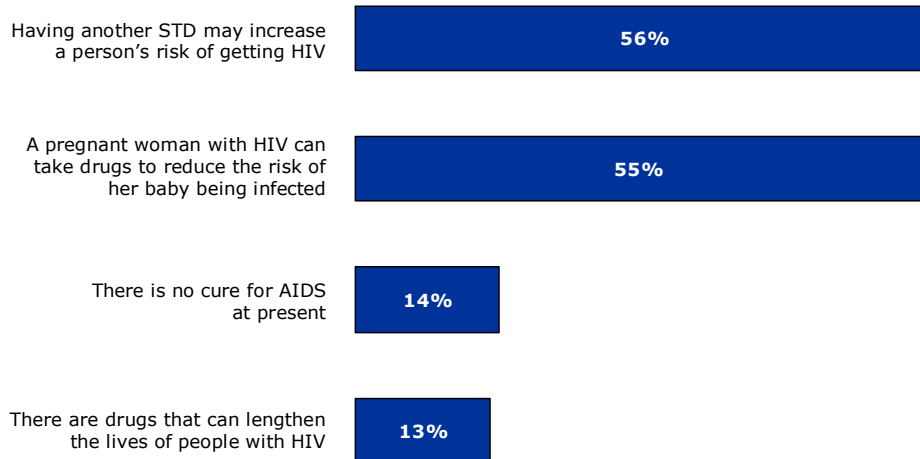
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS* (conducted March 24 – April 18, 2006)

#### 4. Misconceptions About HIV Prevention and Treatment

In addition to misconceptions about HIV transmission, many adults also hold misconceptions about HIV prevention and treatment. In 2006, more than half the public did not know that having another sexually transmitted disease can increase a person's risk of getting HIV (56%), and that a pregnant woman with HIV can take drugs to reduce the risk of her baby being infected (55%). Smaller shares did not know that there is presently no cure for HIV (14%) and that there are drugs that can lengthen the lives of people with HIV (13%).

##### Misconceptions About HIV Prevention and Treatment

Percent who do not know the following statements about HIV are true... (Incorrect answers)



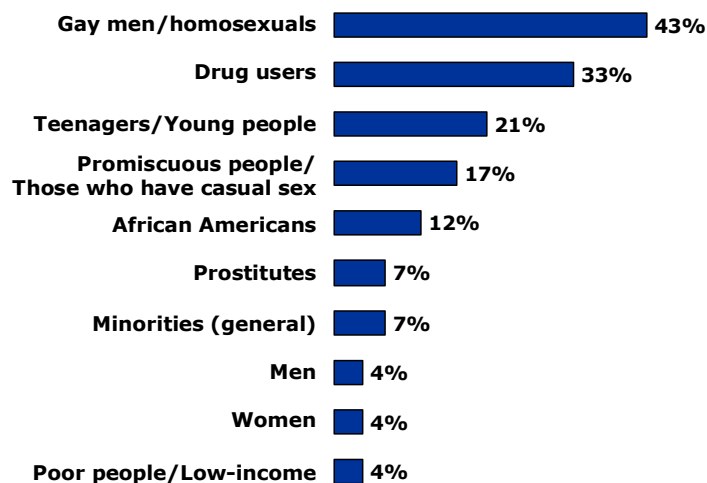
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS* (conducted March 24 – April 18, 2006)

## 5. Perceptions of Groups Impacted by the HIV/AIDS Epidemic

In 2006, in an open-ended question about which groups of people are most likely to be infected with HIV/AIDS, the group named most often by the public was gay men (43%), followed by drug users (33%), teens and young people (21%), and promiscuous people or those who have casual sex (17%). Despite the fact that approximately half of new AIDS diagnoses in the U.S. are among African Americans, just 12% named African Americans in this open-ended question.

### Perceptions of Groups Impacted by the HIV/AIDS Epidemic

When you think about HIV/AIDS, which group of people do you think of first as those who are most likely to be infected? (Open-ended)\*



\* Note: Adds up to more than 100% because of multiple responses.

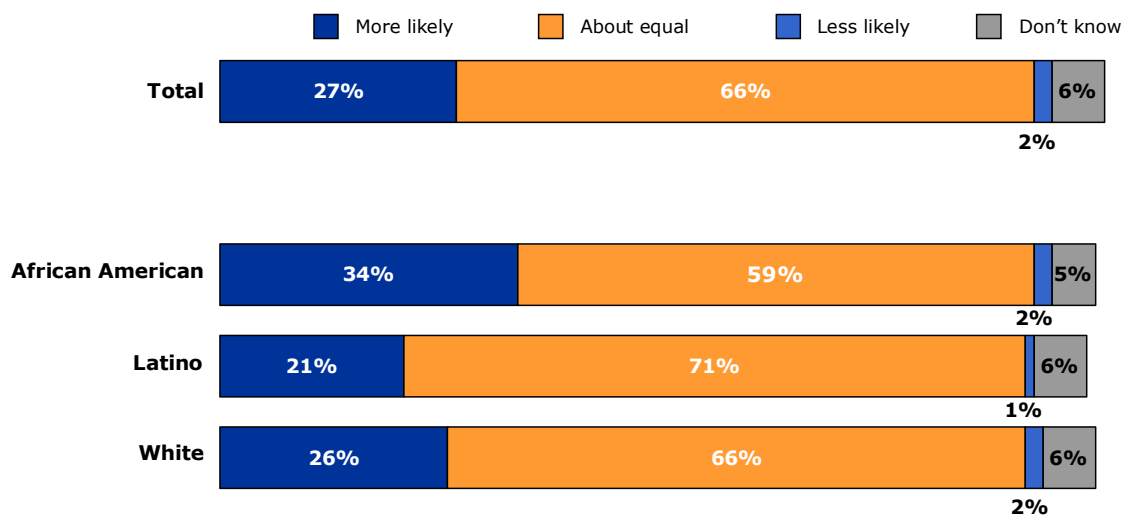
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS* (conducted March 24 – April 18, 2006)

## 6. Perceptions of Relative Likelihood of African Americans and Whites to Be Infected

In 2006, approximately half of new AIDS diagnoses in the U.S. are among African Americans, and the AIDS case rate among African Americans is significantly higher than for whites. Most Americans are not aware of the disproportionate impact of the HIV epidemic on African Americans; just over a quarter say that African Americans are more likely than whites to be infected with HIV. African Americans themselves (34%) are somewhat more likely than whites (26%) and Latinos (21%) to say that this is true, but still the majority are unaware of the disparities.

### Perceptions of Relative Likelihood of African Americans and Whites to Be Infected

As a group, do you think that African Americans in the U.S. are more likely or less likely than whites to be infected with HIV, or do you think African Americans and whites are about equally likely to be infected with HIV?



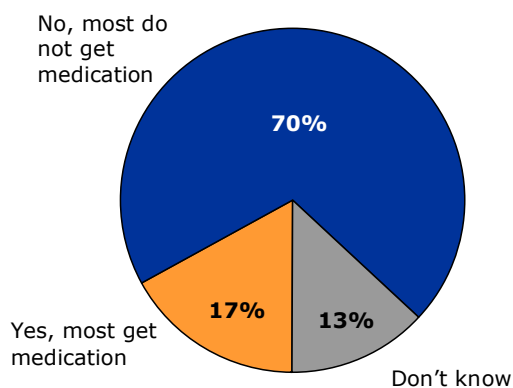
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS* (conducted March 24 – April 18, 2006)

## 7. Perceptions of Access to HIV Prevention and Treatment in the U.S.

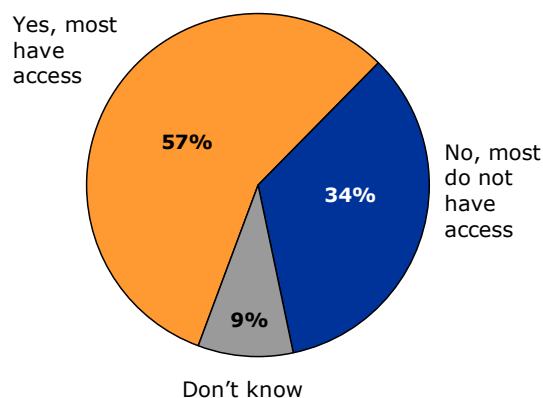
Treatment access is an issue even in the U.S., with the CDC reporting that about half of those who need antiretrovirals are not getting them. Americans perceive these access challenges, with seven in ten (70%) thinking that most people with HIV in the U.S. do not get access to needed medication. However, a majority (57%) believe that most people at high risk for HIV in the U.S. do have access to needed prevention services.

### Perceptions of Access to HIV Prevention and Treatment in the U.S.

Do you think that most people in the U.S. who need medication for HIV actually get that medication, or do you think that most of them do NOT get the medication they need?



Do you think that most people at high risk for HIV in the U.S. have access to needed prevention services, such as HIV education, testing, and counseling, or not?



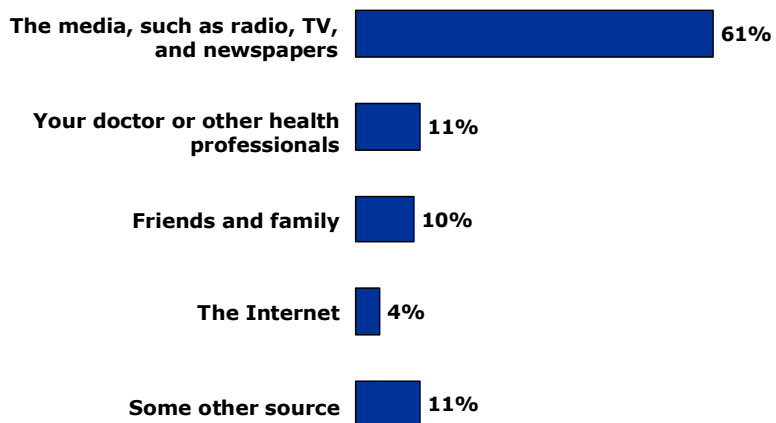
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS* (conducted March 24 – April 18, 2006)

## 8. Sources of Information About HIV/AIDS

More than six in ten adults (61%) say that most of what they know about HIV/AIDS comes from the media, including radio, TV, and newspapers. Much smaller shares say most of what they know about HIV/AIDS comes from their doctor or other health professionals (11%), friends and family (10%), and the Internet (4%).

### Sources Of Information About HIV/AIDS

Thinking about everything you know about HIV/AIDS, does this information mainly come from things you've seen and heard from...



Note: Don't know responses not shown.

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS* (conducted March 24 – April 18, 2006)

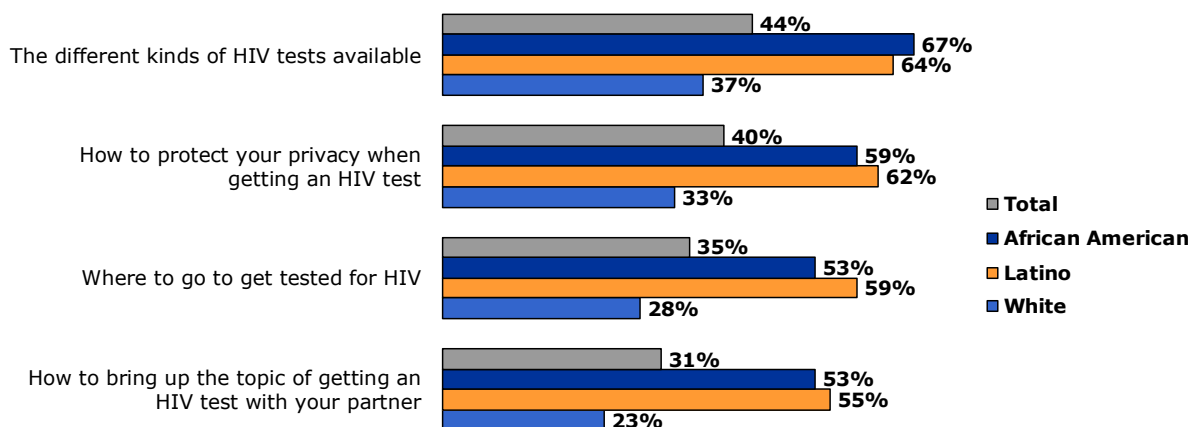
## 9. Information People Would Like to Have About HIV/AIDS

Many people say they would like to have more information about various aspects of HIV/AIDS, with more than four in ten (44%) saying they would like more information on the different kinds of HIV tests available and nearly as many (40%) saying they would like more information about how to protect their privacy when getting an HIV test. More than a third (35%) would like to know more about where to get tested for HIV, and more than three in ten (31%) would like to know more about how to bring up the topic of getting tested with a partner.

African Americans and Latinos are almost twice as likely as whites to say they would like more information about HIV/AIDS.

### Information People Would Like to Have About HIV/AIDS

Percent who say they would like to have more information about...



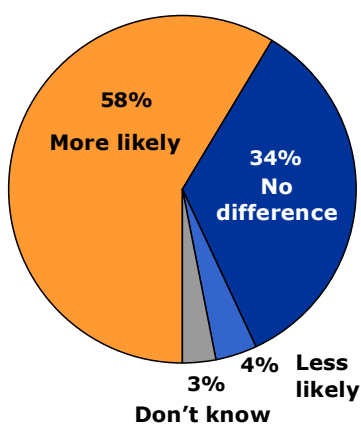
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS* (conducted March 24 – April 18, 2006)

## 10. Perceived Impact of HIV Epidemic on Culture

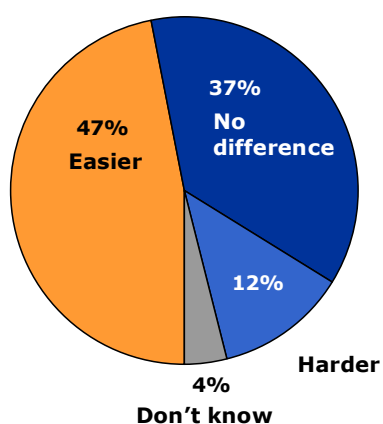
People perceive that the HIV/AIDS epidemic has had a variety of effects on behavior, culture and society in the United States. Almost six in ten (58%) say the epidemic has made people more likely to practice safe sex, and nearly half (47%) say it has made it easier for people to talk openly about sex. However, half (50%) say it has made people more likely to discriminate against gays and lesbians.

### Perceived Impact of HIV Epidemic on Culture

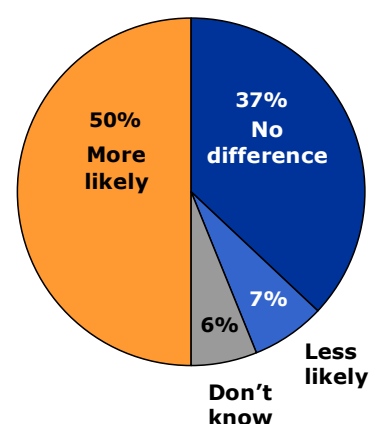
Do you think, in general, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has made people more likely or less likely to practice safe sex, or hasn't it made much difference?



Do you think, in general, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has made it easier or harder for people to talk openly about sex, or hasn't it made much difference?



Do you think, in general, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has made people more likely or less likely to discriminate against gays and lesbians, or hasn't it made much difference?



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS* (conducted March 24 – April 18, 2006)