

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

Attitudes About Stigma and Discrimination Related to HIV/AIDS

This Kaiser Public Opinion Spotlight focuses on the public's views about HIV-related discrimination and stigma, as well as questions that illustrate the public's attitudes towards individuals who are infected with HIV.

Overall, a large share of the public appears to be aware of potential stigma resulting from one's HIV status, with roughly half saying that there is a lot of discrimination against people with AIDS in the United States. While public attitudes towards people with HIV/AIDS have become considerably less negative since the beginning of the epidemic, a substantial minority of the public still holds views that might contribute to people with HIV being stigmatized in this country.

Many people are at least somewhat concerned about the possibility that they will become infected with HIV, and in 2006, significant minorities of the public still incorrectly think HIV might be transmitted through various forms of casual contact, such as kissing (37%), sharing a drinking glass (22%), and touching a toilet seat (16%). These lingering misconceptions are potentially a contributing factor to prejudice against HIV-positive individuals, since people who believe that HIV can be transmitted in these ways are much more likely to express discomfort about working with someone who has AIDS.

Fear of being stigmatized by one's HIV status (or perceived HIV status) also appears to have at least some relationship to people's decisions about whether or not to get tested for HIV. About one in five say that if they were to be tested for HIV, people they know would think less of them.

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>

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

The Public's Knowledge and Perceptions About HIV/AIDS
<http://www.kff.org/spotlight/hiv/index.cfm>

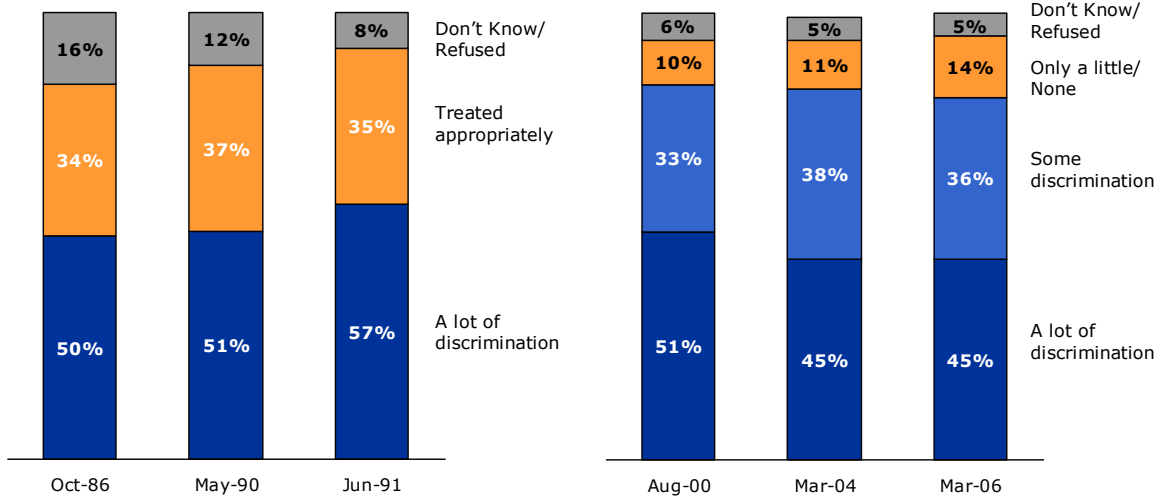
1. Discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS

Since 1986, roughly half of Americans have said that there has been a lot of discrimination against people with AIDS. In 2004, a little less than half (45%) said there was a lot of discrimination, and an additional 38% said they think there has been some discrimination against people with HIV. It is interesting to note that the share saying there is “a lot of discrimination” against people with HIV/AIDS remained virtually the same over the twenty-year period from 1986 to 2006.

Discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS

Do you think there has been a lot of discrimination against people with AIDS, or do you think their treatment has been generally appropriate?

How much prejudice and discrimination do you think there is against people living with HIV and AIDS in this country today?



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation surveys

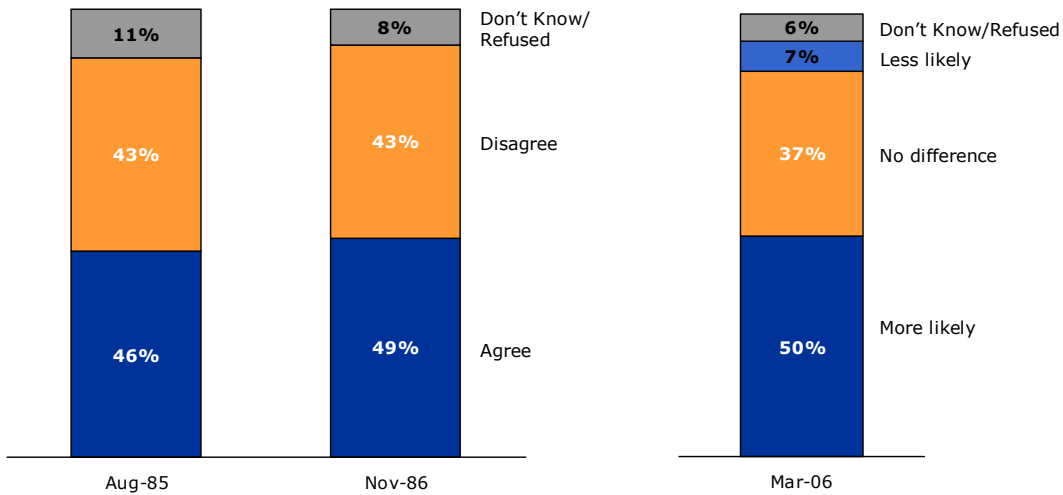
2. Perceived discrimination against gays and lesbians because of HIV/AIDS

In addition to discrimination against people with AIDS, in the early years of the epidemic, many people indicated they believed that the fear of AIDS was causing unfair discrimination against all gays and lesbians. In 2006, after 25 years of HIV/AIDS in the U.S., half the public still says that the HIV/AIDS epidemic has made people more likely to discriminate against gays and lesbians.

Perceived discrimination against gays and lesbians because of HIV/AIDS

Some people think that fear of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is causing unfair discrimination against all homosexuals. Do you agree or disagree?

Do you think 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?



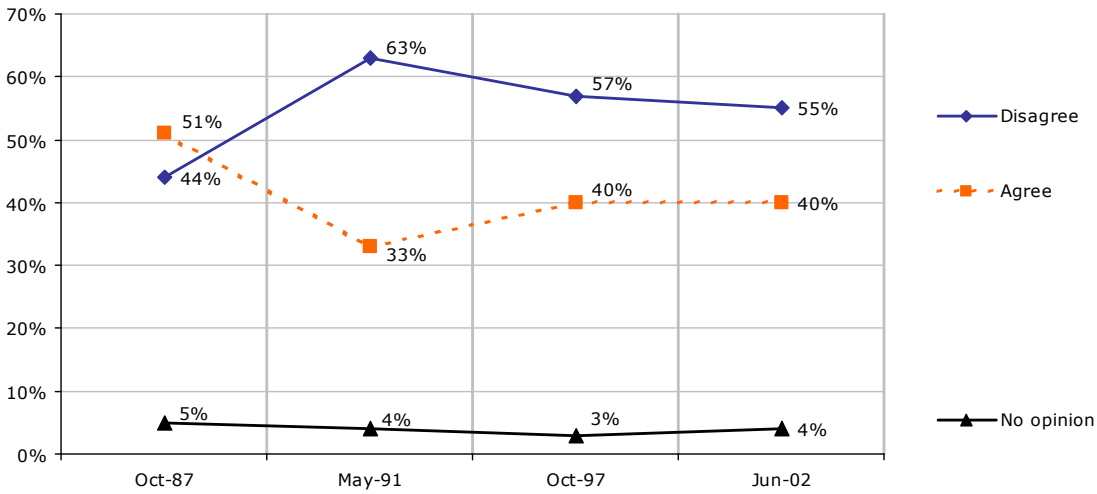
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation surveys

3. Public's views on personal responsibility for contracting HIV

The share of the public that agrees with the statement "In general, it's people's own fault if they get AIDS," decreased somewhat from about half in 1987 to around four in ten in 2002.

Public's views on personal responsibility for contracting HIV

I am going to read some statements about AIDS. As I read each statement, please say whether you agree or disagree with it... In general, it's people's own fault if they get AIDS.



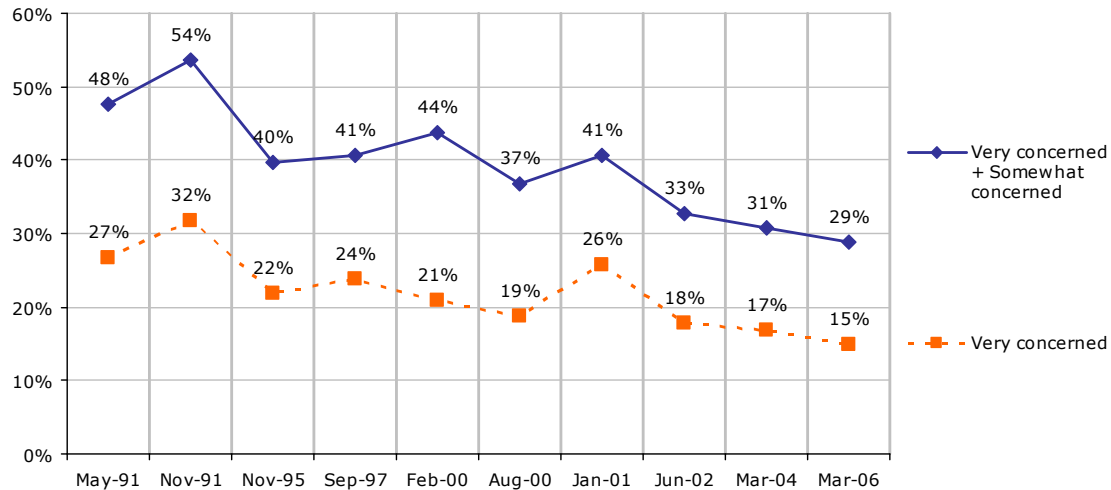
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation surveys

4. Concern about becoming infected with HIV

In general, many people are at least somewhat concerned about the possibility that they will become infected with HIV. There has been a decrease in the amount of concern over the past ten years - the share of people saying they were "very" or "somewhat" concerned declined from about half in 1991 to three in ten in 2006.

Concern about becoming infected with HIV

Bearing in mind the different ways people can be infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS--how concerned are you personally about becoming infected with HIV? Are you...very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned, or not at all concerned?



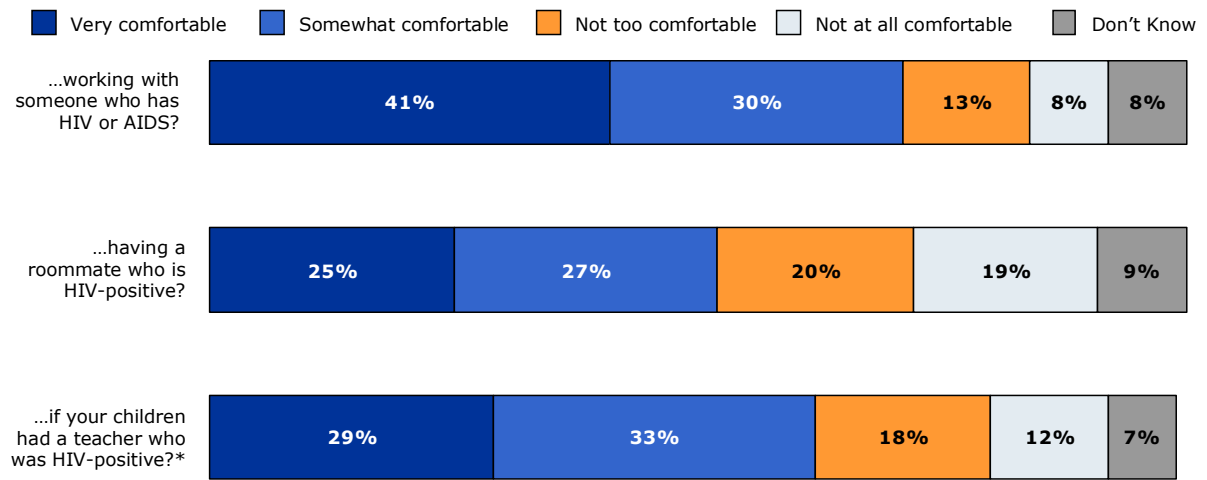
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation surveys

5. Public's reported comfort level with people with HIV

In 2006, about seven in ten people say they would be very (41%) or somewhat (30%) comfortable working with someone who has HIV or AIDS. However, this comfort level decreases with closer relationships (29% of parents say they would be very comfortable if their child had a teacher who was HIV-positive, and 25% say the same about having an HIV-positive roommate).

Public's reported comfort level with people with HIV

In general, how comfortable would you be, personally... (Mar-06)



*Among parents of children ages 21 or younger.

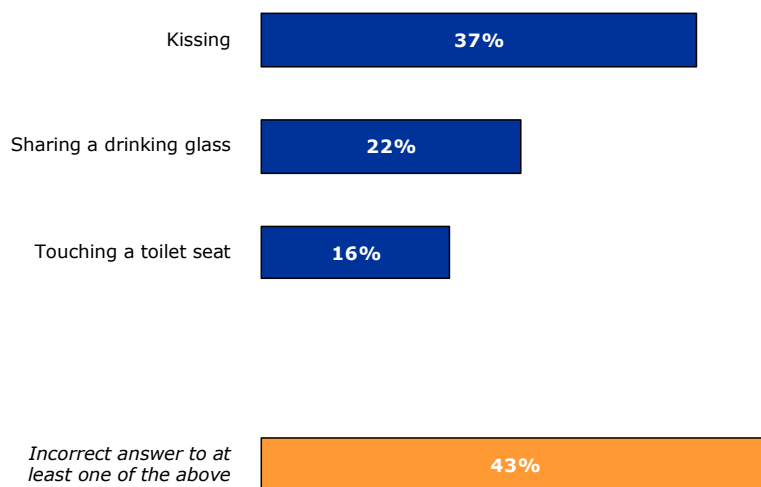
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS* (conducted March 24 – April 18, 2006)

6. Misconceptions about how HIV is transmitted

In 2006, significant minorities of the public still incorrectly think HIV might be transmitted through various forms of casual contact, such as kissing (37%), sharing a drinking glass (22%), and touching a toilet seat (16%). 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)



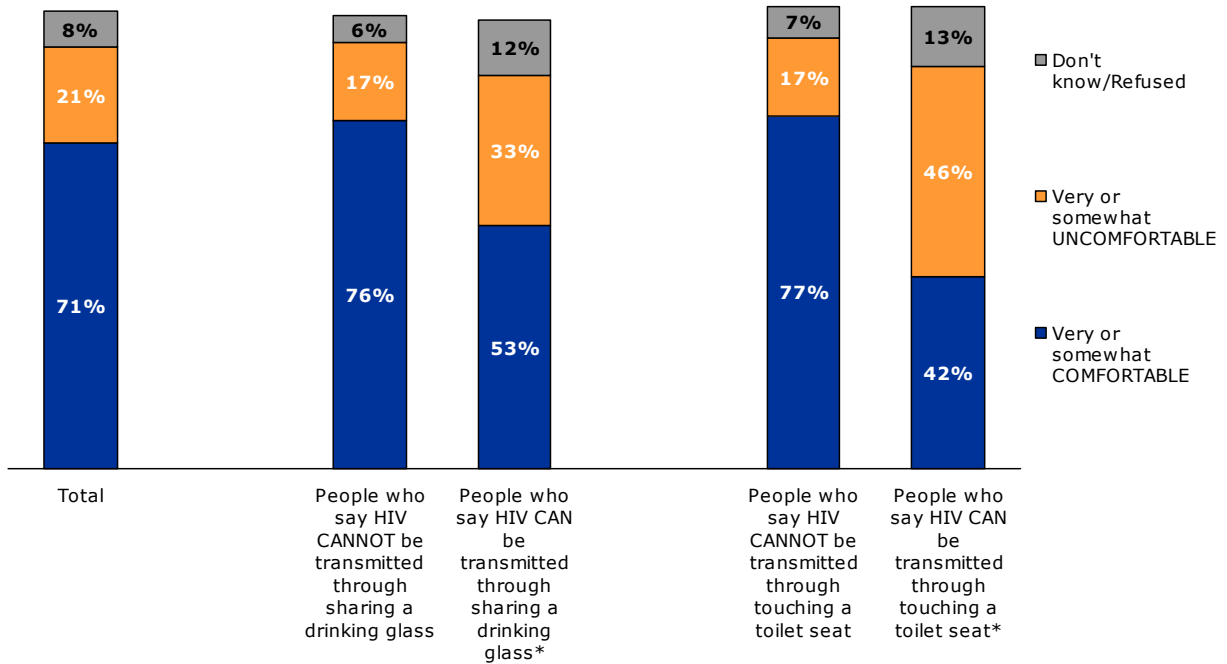
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS* (conducted March 24 – April 18, 2006)

7. Misconceptions about HIV transmission may be related to stigma

Lingering misconceptions about how HIV is transmitted are potentially a contributing factor to prejudice against HIV-positive individuals. People who harbor misconceptions about how HIV is transmitted are much more likely to express discomfort about working with someone who has HIV or AIDS than those who know that HIV cannot be transmitted in these ways.

Misconceptions about HIV transmission may be related to stigma

In general, how comfortable would you be working with someone who has HIV or AIDS? (Mar-06)



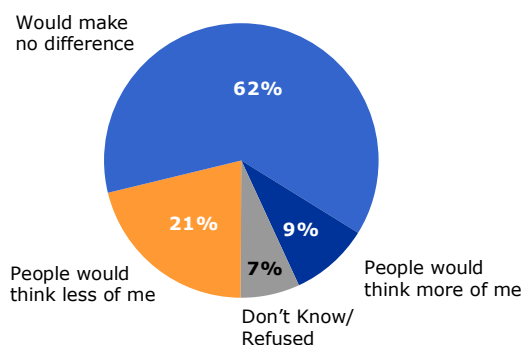
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation *Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS* (conducted March 24 – April 18, 2006) * Includes those who answer "Don't know"

8. Relationship between stigma and HIV testing

Fear of being stigmatized by HIV/AIDS appears to have at least some relationship to people's decisions about whether or not to get tested for HIV. About one in five say that if they were to be tested for HIV, people they know would think less of them. In addition, 13% of people who had never been tested for HIV say that worries about confidentiality were a factor in their decision not to have the test.

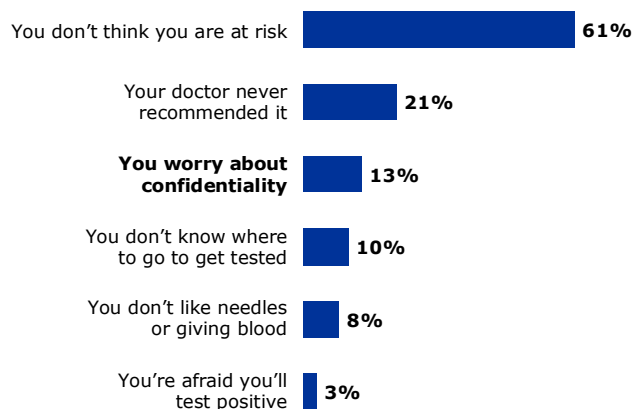
Relationship between stigma and HIV testing

If you were to be tested for HIV, do you think it would make people you know think less of you, think more of you, or would it make no difference in how people you know think of you? (Mar-06)



People have many reasons they might decide not to get tested for HIV. As I read the following list of reasons, please tell me if each one was or was not a reason you have decided not to get tested. (Mar-06)

Asked of the 46% who have never been tested



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