

Survey Brief

June 2009

Views and Experiences with HIV Testing in the U.S.

Since 1995, the Kaiser Family Foundation has been tracking Americans' opinions about HIV/AIDS, including their views and experiences with HIV testing. In our report on the 2009 *Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS*, we presented an overview of the testing-related findings from our most recent survey.¹ This Survey Brief takes a deeper look at the U.S. public's attitudes towards and reported experiences with HIV testing, including which groups are most likely to report being tested for HIV, reasons for being tested or not being tested, communication with doctors and partners about HIV/AIDS, information needs related to testing, and perceptions of testing-related stigma.

Overall, we find that reported rates of HIV testing have remained relatively flat over time. Despite the fact that in 2006, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began recommending routine testing for HIV in health care settings for everyone between the ages of 13 and 64², the share of non-elderly adults who report having been tested for HIV in the last 12 months has not increased in over a decade. Certain groups at higher risk for HIV infection, including African Americans, Latinos, and young adults, are more likely to report having been tested, but reported testing rates for these groups have also remained about the same over the last several years. While an increasing share of African Americans reports talking to their doctor about HIV (67 percent, up from 44 percent in 2000), far fewer say their doctor has ever suggested they be tested (17 percent of the public overall, including 29 percent of African Americans and 28 percent of Latinos).

There are some signs that HIV testing is seen as a normal part of everyday life for many people. The most common reported reason for getting tested among those who have had a test is "it just seemed like a good idea," and more than a quarter of those who have been tested (including 44 percent of African Americans and 38 percent of Latinos) say it is something they do every year. A large majority of the public (69 percent, up from 62 percent in 2006) says if they were to be tested for HIV, it would make no difference in how people they know think of them. However, challenges remain. For instance, those who say people they know would think less of them if they found out they were tested are much less likely to report having been tested than those who do not perceive such potential testing-related stigma.

Reported HIV testing rates

In 2009, nearly half (47 percent) of adults in the U.S. say they have ever been tested for HIV, including 16 percent who say they were tested in the past 12 months. Reported testing rates vary by age, with younger adults more likely to report having been tested than older adults. Those ages 18-29 are most likely to say they were tested in the previous 12 months (30 percent), while those between the ages of 30 and 49 report the highest rates of having ever been tested (61 percent). Few elderly adults report having been tested for HIV – just 16 percent of those ages 65 and older say they have ever been tested, including 2 percent who say they were tested in the past 12 months.

Reported testing rates also vary by race and ethnicity. Among the non-elderly, African Americans are the most likely to say they have been tested (73 percent, including 40 percent who say they were tested in the past 12 months), followed by Latinos (60 percent, including 28 percent in the past 12 months). Non-elderly whites report the lowest rates of testing, with fewer than half (48 percent) saying they have ever been tested, and just 14 percent reporting being tested in the previous 12 months.

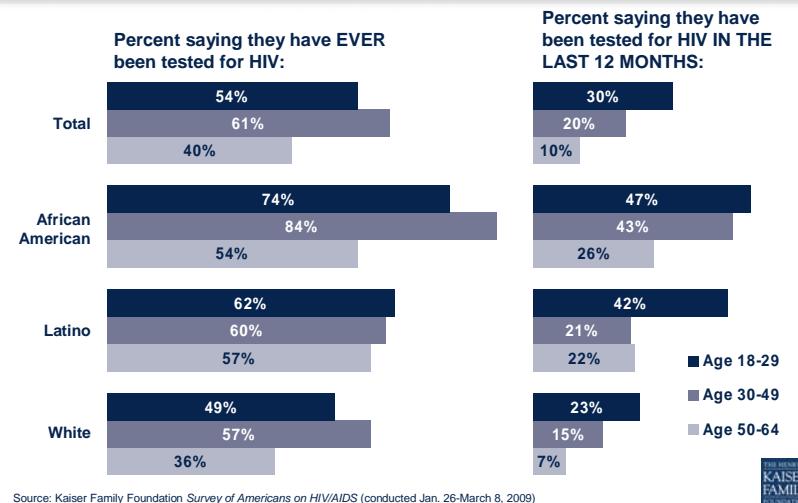
Percent who report being tested for HIV by age and race/ethnicity

| | Among all adults | | | | | Among those ages 18-64 | | | |
|--|------------------|------------|------------|------------|----------|------------------------|------------------|--------|-------|
| | Total public | Ages 18-29 | Ages 30-49 | Ages 50-64 | Ages 65+ | Total | African American | Latino | White |
| Percent saying they have ever been tested | 47 | 54 | 61 | 40 | 16 | 53 | 73 | 60 | 48 |
| Percent saying they have been tested in the past 12 months | 16 | 30 | 20 | 10 | 2 | 19 | 40 | 28 | 14 |

¹ A full report on the overall survey findings is available at: <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/posr042809pkg.cfm>

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, Vol. 55, No. RR-14, September 2006.

Reported HIV Testing By Race/Ethnicity and Age



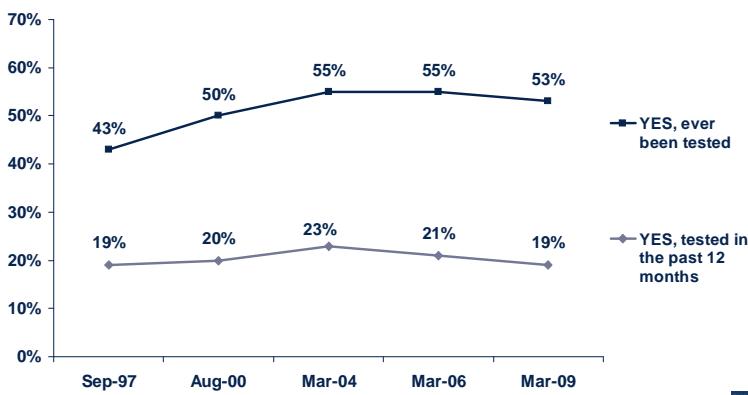
Combining race/ethnicity and age, the highest reported rates of testing are among younger African Americans. Nearly three-quarters (74 percent) of African Americans ages 18-29 and more than eight in ten (84 percent) 30-49 year-old African Americans say they have ever been tested for HIV. Further, more than four in ten of each of these groups report having been tested in the past 12 months (47 percent and 43 percent, respectively).

Trends in reported testing rates

Among the non-elderly, the share who report having ever been tested for HIV increased from 43 percent in 1997 to 55 percent in 2004, and has remained fairly steady since then. The share of those under age 65 who report having been tested in the previous 12 months has remained relatively flat at about one in five since the Foundation began tracking this question in 1997. The share that reports having been tested in the previous 12 months has also remained flat over time for key subgroups of the public, including African Americans, Latinos, and young adults.

Trends in NON-ELDERLY Who Report Being Tested for HIV

Among those ages 18-64, percent saying they have been tested for HIV ever and in the last 12 months...



Trends in reported HIV testing among key subgroups

| | 1997 | 2000 | 2004 | 2006 | 2009 |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|
| Percent saying they have been tested in the past 12 months | | | | | |
| African Americans ages 18-64 | 39 | 33 | 38 | 41 | 40 |
| Latinos ages 18-64 | 24 | 23 | 30 | 28 | 28 |
| Whites ages 18-64 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 16 | 14 |
| All adults ages 18-29 | 26 | 30 | 35 | 26 | 30 |
| African Americans ages 18-29 | 45 | 50 | 48 | NA* | 47 |

* 2006 survey contained too few interviews with African Americans ages 18-29 for reporting.

Reported reasons for getting tested/not getting tested

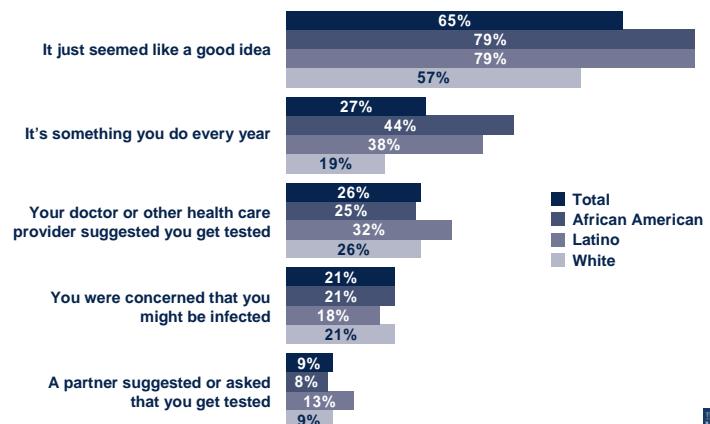
The most commonly reported reason for getting an HIV test among those who have been tested is “it just seemed like a good idea” (65 percent). Over a quarter of those who say they have been tested also say that HIV testing is something they do every year (27 percent) or that a doctor or health provider suggested they be tested (26 percent). Fewer of those who report being tested say they were concerned they might be infected (21 percent), or that a partner asked or suggested that they get a test (9 percent).

While the most common reason for being tested among all groups is that testing “just seemed like a good idea,” African Americans and Latinos are more likely than whites to say that they get tested every year – 44 percent of African Americans who report having been tested and 38 percent of Latinos who report being tested cite this as a reason, compared with 19 percent of whites who report having been tested.

Among those who say they have never been tested, the most commonly reported reason is not feeling at risk (69 percent). More than a quarter (27 percent) say they have not been tested because a doctor never recommended it. Fewer of those who haven’t been tested name other reasons, including being not liking needles or giving blood (8 percent), not knowing where to go to get tested (6 percent), being concerned about confidentiality (5 percent), and being afraid they’ll test positive (2 percent).

Reported Reasons for Being Tested by Race/Ethnicity

Percent saying each of the following is a reason they got tested for HIV
(Among the 47% who report being tested for HIV)

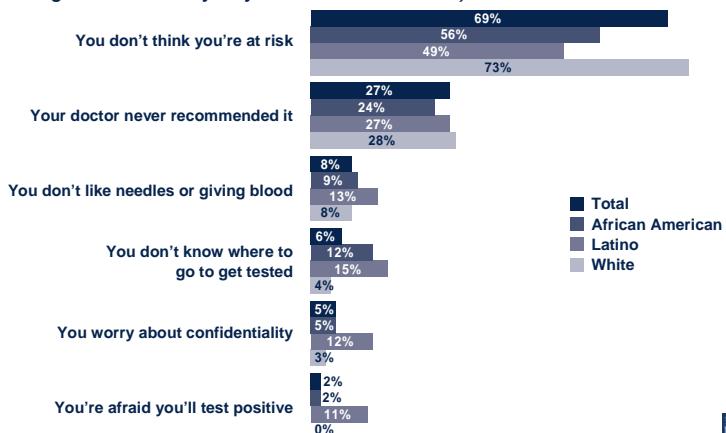


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Source: Kaiser Family Foundation Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS (conducted Jan. 26-March 8, 2009)

Reported Reasons for Not Being Tested by Race/Ethnicity

Percent saying each of the following is a reason they haven't been tested for HIV
(Among the 51% who say they have never been tested)



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS (conducted Jan. 26-March 8, 2009)

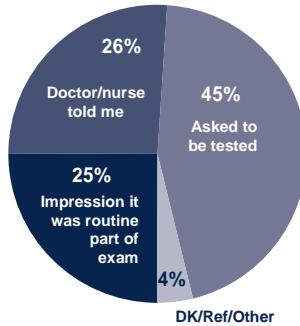
While not feeling at risk is the most common reason for not getting tested among all racial and ethnic groups, African Americans (56 percent) and Latinos (49 percent) are somewhat less likely than whites (73 percent) to cite this as a reason. By contrast, somewhat higher shares of African Americans and Latinos than whites say they haven’t had a test because don’t know where to go to get tested. Latinos who haven’t been tested are also more likely than whites to say they worry about confidentiality and they’re afraid they’ll test positive.

Reported testing experiences

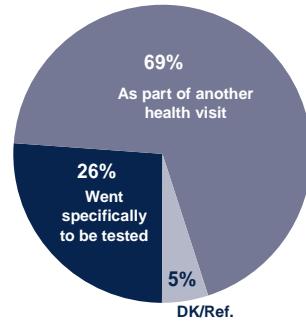
Among the 47 percent of all adults who say they have ever been tested for HIV, nearly half (45 percent) say they asked to be tested, about a quarter (26 percent) say the doctor or nurse told them the test was being done, and another quarter were under the impression it was a routine part of their exam. Just over a quarter (26 percent) of those who report being tested say they went to a doctor or clinic specifically to get an HIV test, while nearly seven in ten (69 percent) say they got tested as part of another health visit such as a routine check-up.

Reported HIV Testing Experiences

The last time you were tested for HIV, how did you know the test was being done? Did you ask to be tested for HIV, did the doctor or nurse tell you this test was being done, or was it your impression that the test was a routine part of the exam? (Among the 47% who report being tested)



The last time you were tested for HIV, did you go to a doctor or clinic specifically to get an HIV test, or did you decide to get an HIV test as part of another health visit, such as a routine check-up? (Among the 47% who report being tested)



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS (conducted Jan. 26-March 8, 2009)

Reported HIV Testing Experiences by Reasons for Getting Tested and by Knowing Someone with HIV/AIDS

By reasons for being tested:

- Personal concern about being infected was reason for getting tested
- Personal concern about being infected was NOT a reason for getting tested

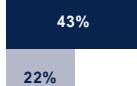


By knowing someone with HIV/AIDS:

- Know someone who now has HIV or has died from AIDS
- Do not know someone who now has HIV or has died from AIDS



Percent who say they went to a doctor or clinic specifically to get an HIV test



Percent who say they went to a doctor or clinic specifically to get an HIV test



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS (conducted Jan. 26-March 8, 2009)

Those who say that one of the reasons they were tested for HIV was because they were concerned about being infected are more likely to say that they asked to be tested for HIV, than those who do not cite this reason (69 percent compared with 39 percent), and that they went to a doctor or clinic specifically to get an HIV test (43 percent compared with 22 percent). Similarly, those who report knowing someone with HIV/AIDS are more likely to say they specifically asked for a test (52 percent compared with 36 percent).



Communicating with doctors and partners about HIV/AIDS

Understanding how people communicate about HIV/AIDS with their doctors and their sexual partners is an important component in examining HIV testing behaviors. Just under four in ten (38 percent) adults overall say they've talked with a doctor or other health professional about HIV/AIDS at some point, while a slightly higher share (45 percent) say they've talked about it with a partner. African Americans, and to a lesser extent, Latinos, are more likely than whites to report discussing HIV/AIDS with their doctors and partners, as are younger people compared with their older counterparts. More than seven in ten African Americans under the age of 50 say they've talked with a doctor or other health professional about HIV/AIDS, and nearly eight in ten of this group reports talking about it with a partner.

Percent who say they've ever talked with a doctor or partner about HIV/AIDS by race/ethnicity and age

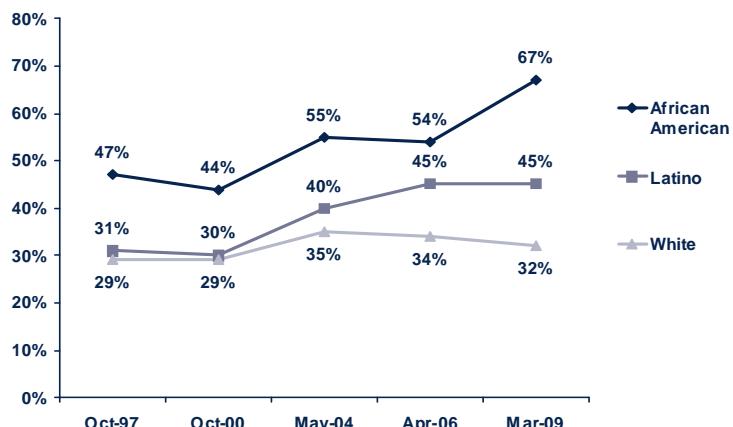
| | Percent who say they've ever talked with a doctor or other health care provider about HIV/AIDS | | | | Percent who say they've ever talked with a partner about HIV/AIDS | | | |
|------------------|--|-------|-------|-----|---|-------|-------|-----|
| | All ages | 18-29 | 30-49 | 50+ | All ages | 18-29 | 30-49 | 50+ |
| Total public | 38 | 50 | 46 | 25 | 45 | 55 | 54 | 33 |
| African American | 67 | 72 | 72 | 59 | 68 | 78 | 76 | 53 |
| Latino | 45 | 52 | 46 | 37 | 52 | 57 | 56 | 42 |
| White | 32 | 46 | 42 | 19 | 40 | 52 | 49 | 29 |

While the shares of Latinos and whites who report discussing HIV/AIDS with a doctor has remained fairly steady in recent years, the share of African Americans who say they have talked with a doctor or other health care provider about HIV increased significantly, from about half in 2004 and 2006, to two-thirds in 2009.

Perhaps not surprisingly, those who report talking with their doctors and partners about HIV/AIDS are much more likely than those who have not to say that they have been tested for HIV. More than eight in ten (82 percent) of those who have discussed HIV/AIDS with their doctor, and about seven in ten (71 percent) of those who have talked about it with a partner say they have been tested for HIV at some point, compared with about a quarter of those who have not discussed HIV/AIDS with a doctor (25 percent) or a partner (27 percent).

Trends in Share Who Report Talking to Doctors About HIV/AIDS by Race/Ethnicity

Percent who have ever talked with a doctor or health care provider about HIV or AIDS:

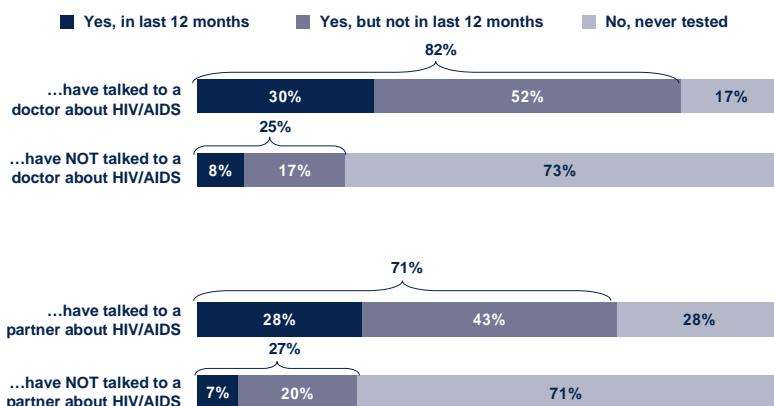


Source: Kaiser Family Foundation surveys

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Relationship Between Talking With Doctors and Partners About HIV/AIDS and Reported HIV Testing

Percent saying they have ever been tested for HIV...



Note: Don't know responses not shown; Numbers may not add up exactly due to rounding.

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS (conducted Jan. 26-March 8, 2009)

While the causality of these relationships cannot be determined from the survey data, multivariate regression analysis reported elsewhere by Kaiser researchers shows that the relationship between talking with a partner about HIV/AIDS and reported HIV testing exists even when controlling for other demographic factors, such as race/ethnicity and age.³

Despite these reported discussions, relatively few adults (just 17 percent) say that a doctor or other health care provider has ever suggested they be tested for HIV. This share is higher among African Americans, Latinos, and those in their 30s and 40s, rising to over a third of African Americans and Latinos ages 30-49 (36 percent and 34 percent, respectively).

Percent saying their doctor or other health care provider ever suggested HIV testing by race/ethnicity and age

| | All ages | Ages 18-29 | Ages 30-49 | Ages 50+ |
|------------------|----------|------------|------------|----------|
| Total public | 17 | 20 | 21 | 13 |
| African American | 29 | 28 | 36 | 24 |
| Latino | 28 | 29 | 34 | 19 |
| White | 14 | 18 | 16 | 10 |

³ Murnane P, Brodie M, Kates J, Hamel L, *Social and demographic determinants of HIV testing in the U.S.* Poster presented at the 42nd Annual Society for Epidemiologic Research Meeting, Anaheim, CA, June 23-26, 2009.

Desire for more information about HIV testing

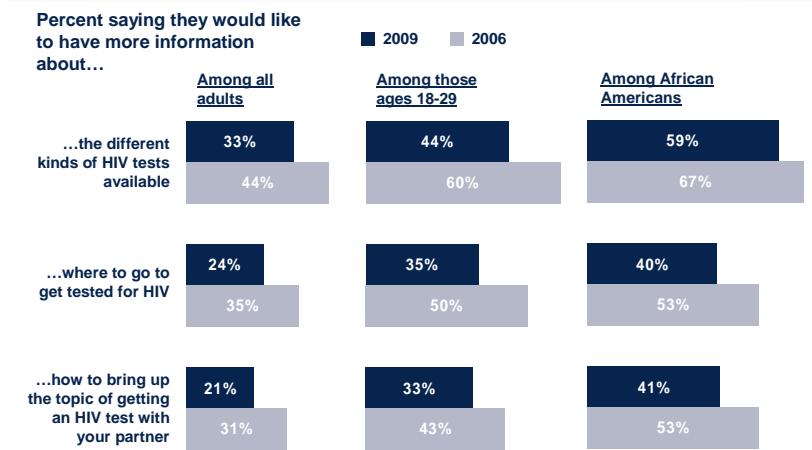
Small but notable shares of the public say they would like to have more information about various aspects of HIV testing, including the different types of tests available (33 percent), how to know whether they should get tested for HIV or not (28 percent), where to go to get tested (24 percent), how to ask a health care provider for an HIV test (22 percent), and how to bring up the topic of testing with a partner (21 percent). Reported desire for more information about testing is more common among young adults and African Americans.

Reported desire for more information about HIV testing by race/ethnicity and age

| | Total public | African American | Latino | White | Ages 18-29 | Ages 30-49 | Ages 50-64 | Ages 65+ |
|---|--------------|------------------|--------|-------|------------|------------|------------|----------|
| Percent saying they would like to have more information about... | | | | | | | | |
| ...the different kinds of HIV tests available | 33 | 59 | 59 | 24 | 44 | 36 | 30 | 18 |
| ...how to know whether you should get tested for HIV or not | 28 | 49 | 50 | 21 | 39 | 28 | 27 | 16 |
| ...where to go to get tested for HIV | 24 | 40 | 49 | 17 | 35 | 24 | 22 | 14 |
| ...how to ask your health care provider for an HIV test | 22 | 39 | 49 | 14 | 31 | 20 | 21 | 14 |
| ...how to bring up the topic of getting an HIV test with your partner | 21 | 41 | 47 | 13 | 33 | 21 | 17 | 11 |

The share who report a desire for more information about HIV testing has declined markedly since the last time this question was asked in 2006, both overall and among young people and African Americans. This could be a reflection of decreased concern about HIV, or it could be that more people feel they already have all the information they need to make decisions about HIV testing.

Desire for More Information Has Fallen Since 2006



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation surveys



Perceptions of testing-related stigma

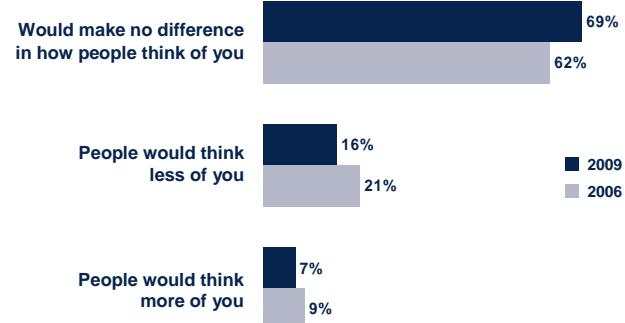
A large majority of Americans report not being concerned about potential testing-related stigma. Nearly seven in ten (69 percent) say that if they were to be tested for HIV, it would make no difference in how people they know think of them, a slight increase since 2006. Just 16 percent say people they know would think less of them if they were tested, while 7 percent say people would think *more* of them. African Americans (19 percent) and Latinos (10 percent) are more likely than whites (5 percent) to say people they know would think more of them if they found out they were tested.

Importantly, there appears to be a relationship between these perceptions and testing. Those who feel that people they know would think *more* of them if they found out they were tested are more likely to report having been tested for HIV (61 percent say they've ever been tested, including 34 percent in the past 12 months), while those who say people they know would think *less* of them are much less likely to report having been tested (32 percent, including 9 percent in the past 12 months).

Again, while the causality is unknown, multivariate analysis finds that the relationship between perceived stigma and reported HIV testing exists even when controlling for other demographic factors, such as race/ethnicity and age.⁴

Perception of Whether Testing Leads to Stigma

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?



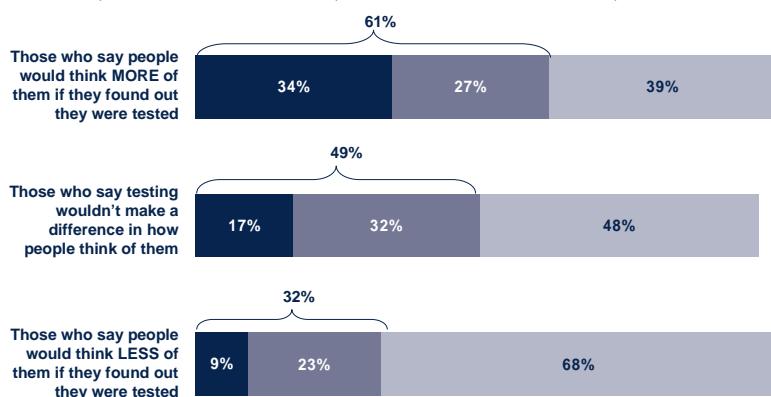
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation surveys



Relationship Between Perception of Testing-Related Stigma and Reported HIV Testing Rates

Percent saying they have ever been tested for HIV...

■ Yes, in last 12 months ■ Yes, but not in last 12 months ■ No, never tested



Note: Don't know responses not shown; Numbers may not add up exactly due to rounding.

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS (conducted Jan. 26-March 8, 2009)



⁴ Murnane et. al., 2009.

Other STD testing

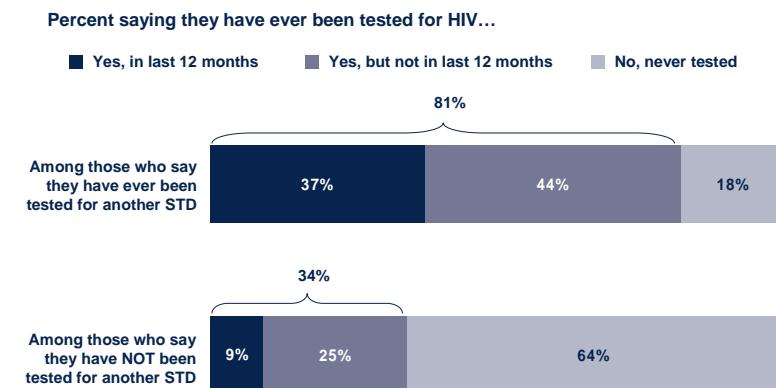
The survey included two questions about testing for sexually transmitted diseases other than HIV. About one in nine adults (11 percent) say a doctor or other health care provider has ever suggested they be tested for any other STD besides HIV, and just over a quarter (27 percent) say they have ever had such a test. These reports are more common among African Americans and Latinos than among whites, and among young people compared with their older counterparts.

Reported testing for other sexually transmitted diseases by race/ethnicity and age

| | Percent who say a doctor or other health care provider has ever <i>suggested they be tested for any other STD besides HIV</i> | | | | Percent saying they have <i>personally ever been tested for any other STD besides HIV</i> | | | |
|------------------|---|------------|------------|----------|---|------------|------------|----------|
| | All ages | Ages 18-29 | Ages 30-49 | Ages 50+ | All ages | Ages 18-29 | Ages 30-49 | Ages 50+ |
| Total public | 11 | 20 | 15 | 4 | 27 | 39 | 33 | 16 |
| African American | 19 | 24 | 23 | 10 | 51 | 54 | 61 | 38 |
| Latino | 19 | 25 | 21 | 10 | 30 | 40 | 29 | 22 |
| White | 9 | 18 | 13 | 3 | 23 | 39 | 29 | 13 |

Perhaps not surprisingly, those who report being tested for another sexually transmitted disease besides HIV are also much more likely to report having had an HIV test. Fully eight in ten (81 percent) of those who say they've been tested for another STD report having been tested for HIV, compared with about a third (34 percent) of those who say they've never been tested for another STD.

Reported HIV Testing Among Those Who Have Been Tested for Other STDs



Note: Don't know responses not shown; Numbers may not add up exactly due to rounding.
Source: Kaiser Family Foundation Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS (conducted Jan. 26-March 8, 2009)



This publication (#7926) is available on the Kaiser Family Foundation's website at www.kff.org.

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