

NATIONAL SURVEY OF TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS ON HIV/AIDS

Kaiser Family Foundation

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There are more than 1.1 million people in the United States living with HIV today, more than at any time in the history of the epidemic. Young people account for two in five new infections in the U.S., and minorities and gay men have been disproportionately affected.

To better understand the views of young people in the U.S. on HIV/AIDS at this critical juncture in the epidemic, the Kaiser Family Foundation contracted with the research firm GfK in the fall of 2012 to conduct a national survey of 1,437 teens and young adults ages 15 through 24.

A Personal as well as Societal Concern

More than three decades into the AIDS epidemic, young Americans say HIV/AIDS remains a serious issue for their generation. For many, especially young people of color, it is also a deeply personal concern. Nearly three times as many Black youth, and twice as many Latinos, say HIV/AIDS is an issue that concerns them *personally* as compared to whites.

One in two (49%) Black youth say they are personally “very concerned” about HIV/AIDS today, and another 21 percent say they are at least “somewhat concerned” about their own risk. This is more than twice the rate of concern expressed by whites, with only a third of white youth expressing any personal concern (17% “very” and 18% “somewhat”). Latinos of the same age fall in the middle with 32 percent saying they are “very concerned” personally, and another 16 percent saying “somewhat concerned.”

These differences in outlook by race also extend to broader concerns expressed by young people about HIV/AIDS as an issue for their generation. Young people of color – those from communities that have been disproportionately affected by the disease – are more likely to see HIV/AIDS as a significant issue for people their age. Twice as many Black (62%) and Latino youth (61%) say HIV/AIDS is “very serious issue for their generation, as compared with whites of the same age (32%).

The greater sense of concern may stem from the fact that Black youth are more likely to know someone living with or who has died of HIV or AIDS, reflecting the more severe impact the disease has had on the community. One in four (24%) Black youth report a personal connection to the disease, as compared with 16 percent of Latinos and 10 percent of whites of the same age. Overall, those between the ages of 15 and 24 are less likely to say they know someone who is living with HIV or has died of AIDS as compared to those who are older (13% compared to 47% among 25 and older), potentially because they are younger.¹

Stigma Contradicts Knowledge

While the large majority of young people agree – 25 percent “strongly” and 54 percent “somewhat” – with the opinion that “it is possible for people with HIV to live healthy, productive lives,” they also say stigma around the disease remains a significant issue. One third (33%) of young people say there is “a lot” of stigma around HIV/AIDS in the U.S., and another 51 percent say there is at least “some.”

When pressed on their own feelings about HIV, a majority say they would be “comfortable” having a close friend who is HIV-positive (58%) or working with someone who is positive (54%), yet reveal less certainty in other settings. Sixty-two percent say they would be *uncomfortable* having a roommate who is positive and 86 percent say they would be *uncomfortable* being in a relationship with someone who is positive. They also express discomfort (68%) at having food prepared by someone who is positive.

These attitudes belie an otherwise fairly realistic view of HIV/AIDS today by most young people. Large majorities understand that HIV is not an issue of promiscuity (81%) and can be spread even when symptoms are not evident (84%). The vast majority (91%) disagrees with the opinion that “HIV is not that big of a deal, you can just take a pill.”

While one in three (34%) say they are “very” confident about the effectiveness of condoms in preventing the spread of HIV, another 48 percent are less certain saying they believe condoms are only “somewhat effective,” and a worrisome minority say they are “not too” (11%) or “not at all” (6%) effective. Also of concern are the three in ten young people who are not aware that birth control pills offer no protection from HIV and other STDs (9% say “not too,” 11% “somewhat,” and 10% “very” effective in protecting against HIV and other STDs).

Acknowledging the gaps in their knowledge and understanding of the disease, many young people say there is more they need to know about HIV/AIDS, including even the most basic facts. A third (36%) say they would like more information about “how to prevent the spread of STDs including HIV,” about as many as say they would like to know more about who should get tested (35%) and how to talk about testing (34%) and protection (27%) with a partner. Young people of color – 54 percent of Black youth and 61 percent of Latino youth – are more likely than whites (34%) to say that they would like to know more about any of the topics asked about. Younger teens, those ages 15-17 (53%), are more likely than young adults, ages 18-24 (40%), to say they want more information.

¹ *The Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation 2012 Survey of Americans on HIV/AIDS*

One factor known to influence views about HIV is a personal connection to the issue. As noted previously, fewer young people have personal knowledge of HIV/AIDS as compared to older Americans.

Black Youth More Likely to be Offered and to Get Tested

One in three (34%) sexually active young people – and 20 percent of all 15-24 year olds – say they have been tested for HIV. Black youth are twice as likely to report having been tested as compared to whites (50% compared to 25%, among those who report having had sex). A third (36%) of Latinos of the same age who have had sex say they've been tested. At least some of those who report being tested may be mistaken in believing the test was done, as 24 percent said they did not actually discuss it, rather just assumed it was included with other STD tests or was a routine part of the exam. Most (65%) of those who say they have been tested for HIV indicate it was part of another health visit; 21 percent say they went specifically to get tested.

For about half (48%) of those who report being tested, having their health care provider recommend they do so was a motivator in their decision. Yet few health care providers actually seem to be suggesting testing to their younger patients. Only 21 percent of young people who say they have had sex – and 13 percent of youth overall – say a health care provider has ever suggested they be tested for HIV. An exception are sexually active Black youth who are significantly more likely to report having had a test suggested by a health care provider (48%) than whites (13%) and Latinos (21%). For those who report being sexually active but say they have not been tested, not believing themselves to be at risk (64%) is the most often reason given for not doing so. A notable 41 percent said it was because their doctor has not suggested it, the next most common response as to why they had not been tested, again reinforcing the role of health care providers in testing decisions. (Respondents were able to give more than one response.)

Another barrier to testing may be the difficulty many young people say they have in talking about HIV/AIDS: 61 percent at least somewhat agree with the opinion that “it is hard to bring up the topic of HIV with a partner.” They also express mixed feelings about how they would feel if a partner suggested they get tested together. Approximately three-quarters say they would be suspicious or worried about the reasoning behind bringing it up, about as many as say they would be glad (78%) it was suggested and that their partner was being responsible (89%) in doing so.

Need for More Information

Most young people say they are not hearing much about HIV/AIDS. Three out of five say they “rarely” (37%) or “never” (27%) saw or read any news coverage about HIV/AIDS or other STDs in the last year. It is also not coming up much in everyday conversation: 39 percent say HIV or other STDs have not come up at all in the last year. Youth of color, and especially Black youth, are more likely to report being exposed to HIV content or otherwise engaged as compared to their white counterparts. For example, nearly half (47%) of Black youth, and 27 percent of Latinos, report talking about HIV or other STDs at least occasionally in the past year, as compared to just 16 percent of white youth.

To the extent they are getting information about HIV/AIDS as well as other STDs, classes or other programs at school are most often named: 74 percent say they have learned a lot or some in school. Other sources, including parents, health care providers, friends and media, are relatively equally referenced as resources with between about 40 and 50 percent saying they have learned at least some from these places. Black youth are more likely to report being exposed to information about HIV/AIDS and other STDs from a variety sources.

View of the Future and Their Role in It

At a time when many experts are saying an AIDS free future is within reach, most young people are largely unaware, as yet, of this possibility with 61 percent of 15-24 year olds saying they have heard “nothing at all” about it. While most young people – 74 percent – say they are not overly optimistic at this time about the prospects of seeing the end of AIDS in their lifetime, there is hope they can be engaged.

When asked what role, if any, they might play in realizing this potential, most say they see at least some role for themselves with 14 percent saying they see themselves having “a big role” and another 45 percent saying they have “a small role” in helping to end AIDS. Black youth, whose community has been among those most affected by HIV/AIDS, are more likely to see an opportunity to make a difference. One in four (25%) Black young people say they have “a big role” to play in achieving this goal, and another 45 percent see at least some role.

METHODOLOGY

This *National Survey of Teens and Young Adults on HIV/AIDS* was designed and analyzed by public opinion researchers at the Kaiser Family Foundation led by Mollyann Brodie, Ph.D. and Tina Hoff including Meredith Mishel, Sarah Levine, and Bianca DiJulio. A web-based survey among 1,437 youth ages 15 through 24 was conducted between September 21 – October 1, 2012. Fieldwork was conducted by GfK (formerly Knowledge Networks). Respondents are members of the KnowledgePanel, a large, randomly draw, representative national panel of households. The panel members are randomly recruited by telephone and by using addressed-based sampling methods, including self-administered mail and web surveys. Households are provided with access to the Internet and hardware if needed. Unlike other Internet research that covers only individuals with Internet access who volunteer for research, Knowledge Networks surveys are based on a dual sampling frame that includes both listed and unlisted phone numbers, telephone and non-telephone households, and cell-phone-only households.

Teenagers (ages 15-17) were invited to participate in the survey through their parents. Because of the potentially sensitive subject matter, parents were provided a brief summary of the survey and asked to provide consent in order for their teen to participate. Seventy-seven percent of parents contacted agreed to allow their teen to participate.

All data were weighted to balance the sample demographics to match estimates for the national population data from the Census Bureau’s August 2012 Current Population Survey on sex, age, education, race, region, and household income. Adjustments for the language spoken at home (English vs. Spanish) are based on the Pew Hispanic Center Survey. All statistical tests of significance account for the effect of weighting.

See table below for information on the margin of sampling error including the design effect. For results based on subgroups, the margin of sampling error may be higher. Sample sizes and margin of sampling errors for other subgroups are available by request. Note that sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error in this or any other public opinion poll.

Population	Number Interviewed	Margin of Sampling Error
Full sample of Youth and Young Adults (15-24 year olds)	1,437	± 4 percentage points
White Youth and Young Adults	733	± 5 percentage points
Black Youth and Young Adults	271	± 10 percentage points
Latino Youth and Young Adults	322	± 9 percentage points

Due to rounding, percentages may not always add up to 100 percent.



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