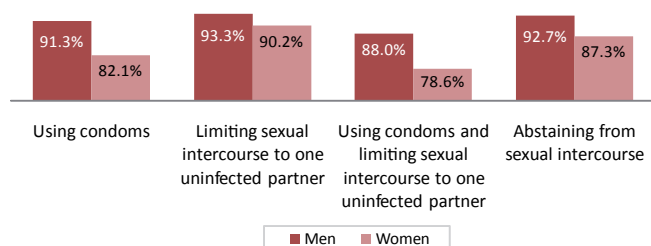




Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a virus that causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and weakens the immune system, making the body susceptible to and unable to recover from other opportunistic diseases that lead to death through these secondary infections. The predominant mode of HIV 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.

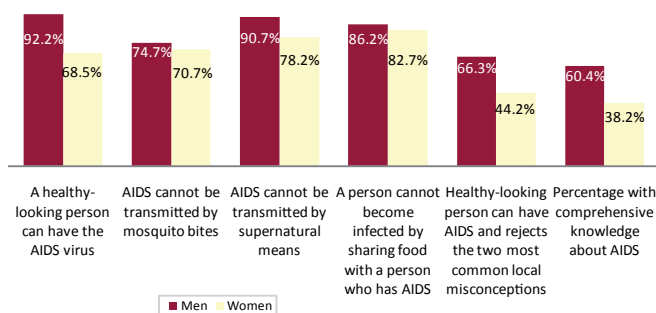
Tuvalu has one of the highest rates of HIV per capita in the Pacific with a total of ten cases of HIV to date. The Tuvalu National AIDS Committee (TUNAC) is the national coordinating body which works to halt the spread of HIV and AIDS in Tuvalu. There is almost universal knowledge of HIV amongst the adult Tuvaluan population (99% of men and 97% of women). More detailed knowledge of HIV and AIDS and how to prevent transmission is slightly less widespread, but still reasonably high. Men appear to have a much better knowledge of HIV and AIDS than women.

**Knowledge of HIV/AIDS prevention methods
Men and women aged 15-49**



The difference between men's and women's knowledge was even more pronounced concerning common misconceptions about HIV/AIDS. Around four in ten women, compared with more than six in ten men, know that a healthy-looking person can have the AIDS virus; that HIV cannot be transmitted by mosquito bites; and that HIV cannot be transmitted through sharing food with an infected person. Overall, 38% of all women compared with 60% of men displayed a comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS.

Comprehensive knowledge of HIV and AIDS



Mother to child transmission

More women than men were aware that HIV can be transmitted by breastfeeding (82% of women and 70% of men). The number of people who were aware that the risk of mother to child transmission can be reduced if an infected mother takes retroviral drugs during pregnancy was much lower, only 34% of women and 38% of men. Young people aged 15-24 were less knowledgeable about mother to child transmission than those aged 25-49.

Stigma and attitudes associated with HIV and AIDS

Most men and women reported that they would be willing to care for a family member with AIDS in their home. Far fewer people (57% of women and 67% of men) reported that they would be willing to buy fresh vegetables from a person they knew has the AIDS virus. Overall, around three in ten respondents expressed accepting attitudes on all four indicators used in the survey.

Attitudes toward negotiating safer sex

Almost all women (88%) and men (95%) agreed that a wife is justified in refusing to have sexual intercourse with her husband if she knows he has a sexually transmitted disease.

Multiple partners and condom use

One percent of women had intercourse with more than one partner in the 12 months preceding the survey and about 4% had higher risk sexual intercourse (sexual intercourse with a partner who was neither a spouse nor lived with the respondent). The numbers were slightly higher for men, with more than 4% having sexual intercourse with more than one partner in the 12 months prior to the survey and one in five had higher risk sex. Of those men who reported having higher risk sexual intercourse, slightly less than half reported using a condom.

There appears to be a disjuncture between stated ideals concerning marital fidelity and actual practice. Although almost all respondents believed that married men and women should only have sex with their partner, only 15% of men and 30% of women reported that most married men they knew only had sex with their wives. Likewise, only around one in three women and one in four men reported that most married women they know only have sex with their husbands.

Payment for sex

One per cent of men aged 15-49 had paid for sex in the 12 months prior to the survey. Most of those who had paid for sex were aged between 20 and 24.





HIV/AIDS prevention among young people

HIV and AIDS knowledge and prevention among young people aged 15-24 years old		
	Women	Men
Comprehensive knowledge of AIDS	39.4%	60.7%
Knowledge of condom source	90.6%	92.9%
Used condom during first sex	1.9%	21%
Percentage who had sex in past 12 months and had higher risk sex	14%	48.9%
Percentage who reported using a condom during higher risk sex	0%	44.1%

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

Around 13% of young women and 52% of young men had sexual intercourse before they turned 18. Very few women reported that a condom was used the first time they had sexual intercourse, however one in five men reported using a condom. Women in rural areas were more likely to have sexual intercourse before the ages of 15 and 18 than those in Funafuti. For men, there was very little difference between urban and rural areas for the age sexual intercourse was initiated.

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

The survey results show a significant difference between the sexual practices of unmarried women and men aged 15-24 years. Nine in ten unmarried women reported that they had not had sexual intercourse, compared with around three in ten unmarried men. Of those men who reported having sexual intercourse, 34% used a condom.

Alcohol consumption and sexual intercourse among youth

Sex under the influence of alcohol can impair judgment, compromise power relations and increase risky behaviour. Among young people aged 15-24 years, 1% of women and 18.5% of men reported having sex while they were drunk.

HIV testing for men and women age 15-49

Although most Tuvaluan men and women reported knowing where to get an HIV test, only one in ten women and around one in five men had ever been tested and received the results. Men and women living in urban areas were more likely to have had an HIV test than those living in rural areas.

In the twelve months prior to the survey, only 3% of women and 13% of men had been tested for HIV and received the results.

Among youth aged 15-24 who had sex in the 12 months prior to the survey, 12% of young men and 5% of young women were tested for HIV and had received the results.

For more information on HIV/AIDS see chapter 12 in the full Tuvalu DHS report

HIV counselling and testing during pregnancy

In order to prevent mother to child transmission of HIV, all women should be counselled about HIV during their antenatal care. The survey results indicate that one in five pregnant women were counselled (this includes discussing prevention methods and being tested) during their pregnancy, yet 10% received their results. An estimated 7% of women who had been pregnant in the two years preceding the survey were counselled, tested and received the results.

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

A small number of men (2%) and women (3%) reported having had an STI or having shown symptoms of an STI in the 12 months preceding the survey. More than one in three men and women who either had an STI or had symptoms of an STI in the 12 months preceding the survey did not seek any treatment.

Policy note:

While the survey reported an almost universal knowledge about HIV/AIDS amongst Tuvalu men (99%) and women (97%), some modest gender differences emerge in knowledge about prevention methods, with men slightly ahead of women. This gap increases more prominently regarding a more comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS, with 60% of men and 38% of women claiming to have such knowledge. Given the Tuvalu National Aids Committee's current operation plan running from 2009 – 2013, these Tuvalu DHS findings ought to translate into more focused education and awareness programmes targeting women.

The survey results indicate that most women do not start to have sex until they are 18, with only 13% of women compared to 52% of young men sexually active before that age. With most of Tuvalu's 15-24 year old men (93%) and women (91%) aware of where to obtain condoms, actual condom use during first sex is alarmingly low for women (2%) and men (21%), with figures reported for young women of particular concern. This indicates, as reported in other Pacific Island DHS reports, that safe-sex messages are clearly not reaching their audience and being translated into behaviour change, a message that ought to be picked up by current HIV/AIDS communication strategies and programs.

