

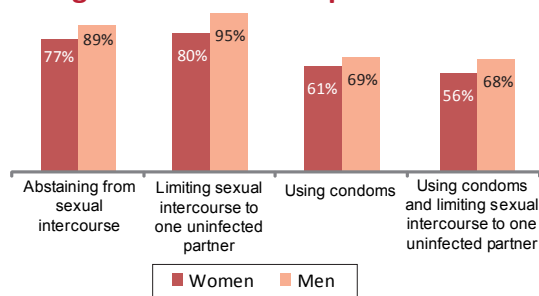


Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a virus that causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and weakens the immune system, making the body susceptible to and unable to recover from other opportunistic diseases that lead to death through these secondary infections. The predominant mode of HIV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

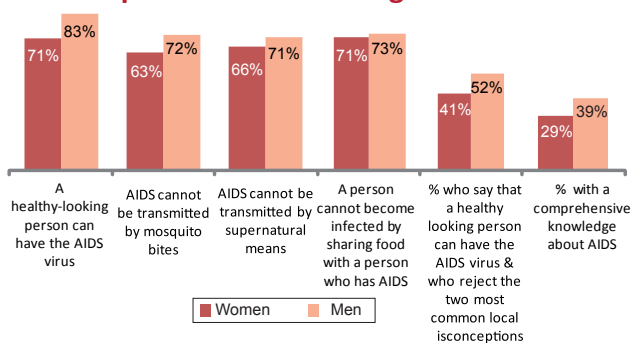
Knowledge of HIV and AIDS is widespread but not universal among the adult Solomon Islands population (94% of women and 98% of men aged 15–49). However, while general knowledge of HIV and AIDS is quite high, more comprehensive knowledge is much lower (29% of women and 38.6% of men).

Consistent condom use was the least known way of preventing HIV transmission.

Knowledge of HIV and AIDS prevention methods



Comprehensive knowledge of HIV and AIDS



Mother to child transmission

Sixty nine per cent of all Solomon Islands women and 53 per cent of all men were aware that HIV can be transmitted via breastfeeding or during pregnancy, and only 8 per cent of women and 9.2 per cent of men were aware of the potential benefits of anti-retroviral medicines during pregnancy for HIV positive mothers. Knowledge appears to be slightly lower among currently pregnant women.

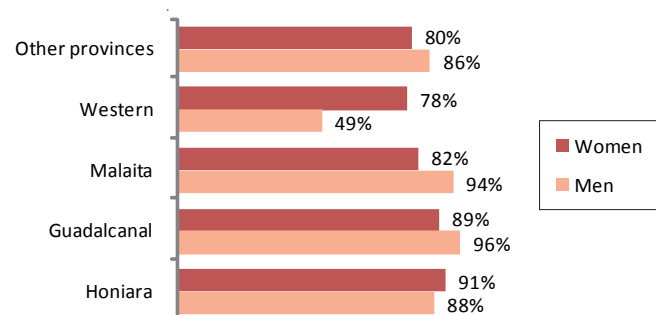
Stigma and attitudes associated with HIV & AIDS

The findings indicate that stigma associated with HIV and AIDS is high in Solomon Islands, with very few people showing accepting attitudes towards people living with HIV/AIDS even if the infected person is a family member. Only 56 per cent of men and 36 per cent of women stated that they would be willing to care for a family member who is infected with HIV. Very few respondents expressed accepting attitudes on all indicators (10% of men and 5% of women)

Attitudes toward negotiating safer sex

A similar proportion of women and men (83% and 86% respectively) agreed that a woman is justified in refusing to have sex with her husband or asking that he use a condom if she knows he has a sexually transmitted disease. While there is no substantial difference in the proportion of women and men overall, it is of note that less than 50 per cent of men in Western Province think it is justifiable for a wife to refuse sex or to negotiate safer sex.

Agreement with a woman's right to either refuse sex or ask that her husband wear a condom



Payment for sex

The results showed that about 2 per cent of all men aged 15–49 years paid for sex in the 12 months prior to the survey.

Male circumcision

Recent studies have indicated that male circumcision may reduce the risk of HIV transmission. Overall, 4.4 per cent of men reported to have been circumcised. There is a significant difference between ethnic groups, with only 3 per cent of Melanesian men reporting to have been circumcised compared with 45 per cent of Polynesian men.

Multiple sex partners and high risk sex

Overall, 15 per cent of women and 32 per cent of men reported to have had higher-risk sex in the past 12 months.

While the survey revealed a strong belief that both husband and wife should be faithful to one another, only one in five women and men stated that they know a husband and/or wife who only has sex with his or her spouse.





HIV and AIDS knowledge and sexual behaviours among young men and women (15–24 years)		
	Women	Men
Comprehensive knowledge of AIDS	29.3%	35.1%
Knows consistent condom use can reduce the risk of HIV transmission	61.4%	67.9%
Knowledge of a condom source	46.0%	81.0%
Used a condom during first sex	14.1%	14.8%
Had high-risk sex in the past 12 months	43.4%	78.9%
Used condoms during high-risk sex	16.5%	25.6%
Had sex before 18 years of age	51.1%	54.8%

Premarital sex and condom use

About 36 percent of never-married women and 55 per cent of never-married men (aged 15–24 years) reported having had sex in the past 12 months. Of these young men and women reporting premarital sex, 17 per cent of young women and more than a quarter of never married young men reported using a condom during last sexual intercourse.

High-risk sex among youth

Almost four in five young men (78.9%) and two in five young women (43.4%) who had sexual intercourse in the past 12 months had high-risk sex.

Of those that had high-risk sex, only one in four young men (25.6%) and 16.5 per cent of young women reported using a condom during their last high-risk sex.

Of the young women who had high-risk sex, 6.2 per cent of those aged 15–19 had sex with a man about 10 years older than them.

Alcohol consumption and sexual intercourse

Sex under the influence of alcohol can impair judgement, compromise power relations and increase risk taking behaviour. Only a small proportion of young women and men 15–24 years (0.6% and 5%, respectively) reported that they were drunk during their last sexual intercourse.

Sexually transmitted infections

The 2007 incidence rate of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in Solomon Islands was reported to be on the rise, with an increased number of cases treated during the year. While the numbers are relatively small compared with other reasons for clinical attendance during the year, STI trends are monitored as they are closely associated with HIV; they share similar risk factors, and increase the likelihood of contracting HIV.

Slightly fewer women (2.6%) than men (3.5%) reported that they had an STI or symptoms of an STI in the 12 months preceding the survey. Of those reporting having an STI or symptoms, 40 per cent of women and 35 per cent of men sought treatment from a clinic/hospital/private doctor or other health professional, while 33 per cent of women and 26 per cent of men did not seek any advice or treatment.

Policy note:

There appears to be a gap in knowledge particularly around condoms in the reduction of exposure to HIV. While 80 per cent of respondents know that condoms could be used as a contraceptive, many fewer knew that they could be used to prevent HIV. This may explain the high reported levels of unprotected sex, in particular among those having higher-risk sex.

Several of the survey findings, that half of Solomon Islands young men and women have already had sex before they turned 18, only 14 and 15 per cent of 15–24 year old men and women respectively, reported using a condom during their first sexual intercourse, less than half of young women know where to get a condom, and over three in four young men had high-risk sex in the 12 months prior to the survey indicates that 'safe sex' messages are not getting through, which should be of considerable public health concern.

In addition, very few Solomon Islanders know where they can get an HIV test done (26% of women and 38.9% of men), and while most people surveyed expressed a belief in being faithful, only one in five reported that people they knew actually practiced this.

It appears that basic awareness of HIV and AIDS is reasonable, while comprehensive knowledge and corresponding behaviour is still poor, despite many years of sexual and reproductive health education. Different strategies, and a more pronounced focus on behaviour change are needed as well as greater targeting of women living in rural area.

* For more information on HIV/AIDS related knowledge, attitudes and behaviours see chapter 13 in the full 2007 SI DHS report.

