



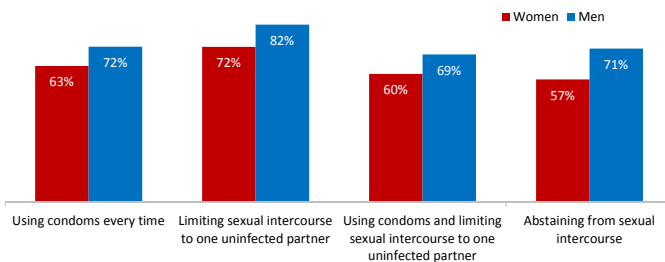
Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a virus that causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and weakens the immune system, making the body susceptible to and unable to recover from other opportunistic diseases that lead to death through these secondary infections.

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.

Vanuatu has a low reported HIV prevalence with 9 people having been diagnosed with HIV as of the end of 2012. Of those people, six remain living in Vanuatu.

2013 Vanuatu DHS data show that about the same proportion of women (91%) and men (92%) have heard of AIDS, but knowledge of how to prevent HIV infection was less pronounced across different answer categories: these range from 57% of females referring to “abstaining from sexual intercourse”, to 82% of males making reference to “limiting sexual intercourse to one uninfected partner” (Fig. 1). Young people display a similar level of knowledge about how to prevent HIV.

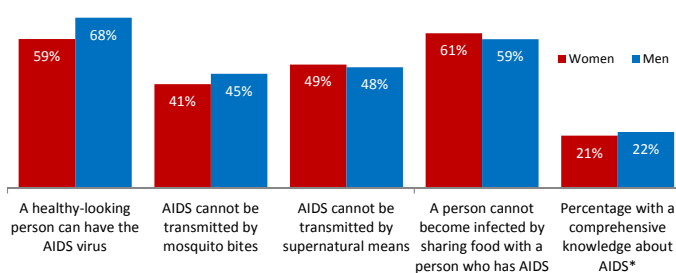
Figure 1: Knowledge of HIV and AIDS prevention methods, Men and Women aged 15–49



Percentage of respondents who correctly answered that each method could reduce their chances of getting AIDS.

Despite most people reporting some knowledge about HIV and AIDS, only one in five people (21% of women and 22% of men) had a comprehensive knowledge about AIDS. The survey reveals prevailing misperceptions about the transmission of HIV and acquiring AIDS, with less than half of all men and women knowing that AIDS could not be transmitted through mosquito bites or supernatural means (Fig. 2).

Figure 2: Rejection of misconceptions about HIV transmission, and comprehensive knowledge, Men and Women aged 15–49



\* Comprehensive knowledge means knowing that consistent use of a condom during sexual intercourse and having just one uninfected faithful partner can reduce the chance of getting the AIDS virus, knowing that a healthy-looking person can have the AIDS virus, and rejecting the two most common local misconceptions about AIDS transmission or prevention - mosquito bites and sharing food.

Comprehensive knowledge of AIDS was lowest amongst the youth population, at just 18% of women and 19% of men aged 15–24 years.

### Stigma and attitudes associated with HIV and AIDS

Survey results indicate a strong stigma and negative attitudes towards people living with HIV. Only 10% of women and 19% of men aged 15–49 expressed overall tolerance and acceptance of people living with HIV. Although many people would be willing to care for a family member with HIV at home (63% of women and 75% of men), one in three people did not think a female teacher with HIV should be allowed to keep teaching (30% of women and 34% of men).

### Knowing where to obtain HIV test

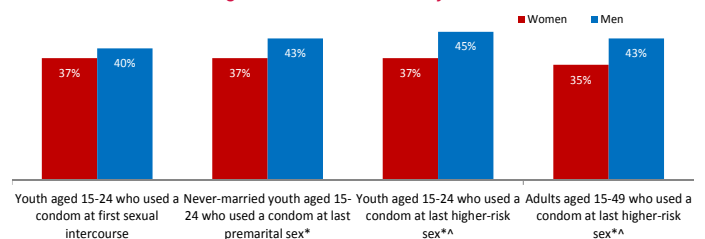
About two-thirds of women and three quarters of men knew where to obtain an HIV test. The incidence of people knowing where to get an HIV test increased with level of education, and urban respondents also were more likely to know where to obtain HIV test compared to rural respondents.

### Multiple partners and condom use

Among adults aged 15–49, ni-Vanuatu men reported to have had on average 5 sexual partners in their lifetime compared to women’s reference to 2 partners over their lifetime. Such a male-female difference is also reflected among those who had sexual intercourse during the 12 months prior to the survey, with three times more men (7%) than women (2%) reporting to have had 2 or more sexual partners. Of this group, 30% men and 13% women had high-risk sexual intercourse. Although the actual numbers are small, it is important to note that amongst these men and women, less than half had used condoms (35% women and 43% men) (Fig. 3).

The incidence of high-risk sex is high among young adults engaging in sex (36% of young women; 72% of young men). Looking at overall low condom use rates amongst those engaged in high-risk sex, clearly puts these young people, especially young men, at greater risk of contracting and transmitting STIs and HIV.

Figure 3: Condom use by sex



\* Among respondents who had sex in the previous 12 months.

\*\* Higher risk sex was defined as sexual intercourse with a partner who neither was a spouse nor who lived with the respondent.

### Payment for sex

Male respondents aged 15–49 years were asked if they had paid for sexual intercourse during the 12 months preceding the survey, and whether a condom had been used at the time of last paid intercourse. The results show that at the national level, 3% had had paid for sex, with similar figures emerging for never married (4%) and married males (3%). Because the proportion of males reporting to have recently engaged in paid sexual intercourse is quite small, it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions about the use of condoms.



## Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

The number of people who reported having had an STI was low at about 4% of men and women, with only marginal differences across age-groups and other socio-economic and locational variables, to draw meaningful conclusions.

Table 1: HIV and AIDS prevention among young people

HIV and AIDS knowledge and prevention among young people aged 15–24 years old				
	Women		Men	
	Primary education	Secondary education	Primary education	Secondary education
Has comprehensive knowledge about AIDS	12%	25%	13%	26%
Knows a condom source	58%	74%	80%	89%
Had sex before age 15	8%	5%	7%	8%
Had sex before age 18	52%	34%	58%	53%
Used a condom at first sexual intercourse	29%	47%	32%	52%
Used condom at last sexual intercourse	30%	45%	36%	51%
Used a condom at last higher-risk intercourse	30%	44%	42%	50%

## Age at first sexual intercourse (15–24 year olds)

A small proportion of adolescents aged 15–24 had sexual intercourse before age 15 (6% of women and 7% of men), but by age 18, this increased markedly to 41% of women and 53% of men. Ever-married women were more likely to have had sex by age 18 (52%) than never married women (29%). Comparatively, a higher percentage of young women have had sex by age 18 in rural areas (46%) compared to urban women (34%). Women with just a primary level of education were more likely to have had sex before age 15 (8%) and before age 18 (52%) compared to women with a secondary level education (5% before age 15 and 34% before age 18). Less than half of these sexually active young people (37% women and 40% men) used condoms at their first sexual intercourse, with a similar pattern also (37% women and 43%) reported for their last sexual intercourse.

## Premarital sex and condom use (15–24 year olds)

The survey results show that of the 96% of unmarried young women who had higher risk sex in the past 12 months, only 38% used a condom compared to 44% of unmarried young men out of the 94% who had higher risk sex. The low condom use rate could be a reflection of young people not knowing where to obtain condoms, or where to obtain them anonymously.

## Alcohol consumption and sexual intercourse among youth

The influence of alcohol can impair judgment, compromise power relations and increase risky behaviour. It is worth noting, that only a small percentage of young people (15–24) in Vanuatu reported having had sex when drunk, with less than 1% of young women compared to 5% of young men aged 15–24 reporting to have engaged in such activity. Approximately 6% of young women and 5% of young men reported having had sex when their partner was drunk.

\*For more detailed information on HIV/AIDS see chapter 13 in the 2013 Vanuatu DHS report.

## Policy note

While most Ni-Vanuatu women and men have heard about HIV and Aids, knowledge about prevention, and safe sex practices do lag somewhat behind, with only one in five women (21%) and men (22%) reporting a comprehensive HIV knowledge. Of particular concern are prevailing misconceptions about transmission, with only 1 in 2 men and women reporting that Aids cannot be transmitted by mosquito bites or supernatural means. Despite many years of HIV/Aids education, such figures suggest that key messages have not been absorbed by half the population, and that continued and more intensive education and health promotion ought to be considered.

The incidence of high-risk sex (36% women and 72% men) is high among young adults (15–24). Together with condom use rates of 36% for women and 45% for men puts those young people, especially the young men at greater risk of contracting and transmitting STIs and HIV. As indicated above, stepped-up efforts to advocate STI prevention methods ought to be considered, with a particular focus on young people.

With higher rates of condom usage at last higher-risk intercourse among young men (45%) than young women (36%), usage shows distinct variations which ought to be considered when devising stepped-up health education and advocacy measures:

- a higher proportion of women in urban areas (43%) used a condom at last higher-risk sex compared to women in rural areas (32%), with similar contrasts also prevailing amongst urban (50%) and rural (40%) males.
- Similar differences emerge when considering levels of education attainment: only 30% of women and 42% of men with a primary level education used a condom at last higher-risk sex, compared to 44% of women and 50% of men with a secondary level education. While providing a basis for more targeted health education initiatives, the key challenge is that condom use still remains below 50%, which ought to call for a greater sense of policy urgency to address this situation.