

Sexual Behaviour among Estonian Adult Population 2017

The study “Sexual Behaviour among Estonian Adult Population” was carried out in 2017 among people between the ages of 18 and 79, and the data was collected between 14 March and 4 September 2017. This is a quantitative cross-sectional study. The survey was carried out by mail as well as online. The primary objective is to get an overview of the sexual behaviour of the Estonian population and factors associated with it, identify the use of health services for HIV and sexually transmitted infections, evaluate the knowledge of HIV transmission routes and the attitude towards people living with HIV.

The data of 1,867 people have been included in the analysis and the response rate is 29%. The results have been weighted by gender and age based on data from Statistics Estonia.

General health

- 30% of people are suffering from a long-term illness or health problem.
- 64% evaluate their health as good or very good.
- 15% may suffer from mental health problems.
- 79% have visited a general practitioner within the last year.

Substance use

- 21% are daily smokers.
- 18% had used alcohol two to three times a week or more often in the last year.
- 33% may have problems with alcohol consumption (including alcohol abuse and addiction).
- 25% have ever used drugs, 7% had used drugs in the last 12 months.
- Cannabis products are the most commonly used drugs. Based on the data of last drug use, at least 22% has used cannabis products, and 6% had used them within the last year.
- 1% have ever injected drugs.

Knowledge and attitudes

- 68% have correct knowledge about HIV transmission routes.
- 45% showed stigmatizing attitudes towards people living with HIV. Persons who have people living with HIV among their acquaintances or who have correct knowledge of HIV transmission routes reported less stigmatizing attitudes.

Sexual intercourse experience

- 97% have ever had a sexual intercourse.
- 59% have become sexually active at the age of 18 or older. The average age of a person at the time of their first sexual intercourse was 18.5 years. Comparison across generations show that nowadays people become sexually active at a younger age and it is particularly notable among women: the average age for becoming sexually active among women between the ages of 18–29 and 30–39 was 17 and 17.4, whereas women between the ages of 60–69 became sexually active at 20 years of age on average, and women between the ages of 70–79 at 20.5 years of age.
- 71% have had sexual intercourse in the year preceding the survey. 29% have not had sexual intercourse and have marked their own or their partner’s health-related problems as the reason. Good general health is related to an active sex life. 83% of people who evaluated their health as good or very good had had sexual intercourse in the last 12 months, the indicator was 55% for people whose health was neither good nor bad and 32% for people with bad or very bad self-reported health.
- 15% have looked for a sexual partner online or using a mobile app, 9% were looking for a steady partner and 11% for a casual partner. 10% have had sexual intercourse with a person they met online and/or through a mobile app, including 5% who found a steady partner and 7% who had intercourse with a casual partner.

- 61% evaluate their sexual health as good or very good, 29% find it neither good nor bad and 10% believe their sexual health to be bad or very bad.
- 69% are satisfied or mostly satisfied with their sex life. 31% are unsatisfied with their sex life for which the most common reason is a long time since their last intercourse.

Number of sexual partners

- 51% have had intercourse with five or more partners in their lifetime, 32% with 2–4 partners and 17% have had only one sexual partner. The number of partners is somewhat higher among younger people, and this trend is especially evident among women: the results were nearly four times higher among women between the ages of 30–39 than among those between the ages of 70–79, as 62% and 16% respectively have had more than five sexual partners in their lifetime.
- 84% of respondents have had one sexual partner in the last year and 16% have had two or more partners. The average number of sexual partners in the last 12 months is 1.5. Persons who have problems with alcohol consumption or who have used drugs in the year preceding the survey have had more sexual partners in the last year.

Type of sexual partners

- 94% of persons who have had sexual intercourse in the last 12 months have had intercourse with a steady partner, constituting 67% of the total sample. 92% of respondents have had one sexual partner in the last year; the average number of sexual partners is 1.2.
- 13% of persons who had had sexual intercourse in the last 12 months had done so with a casual partner, constituting 9% of the total sample. 40% of persons who had casual intercourse had only one casual partner; the average number of casual partners is 2.4. Persons who have problems with alcohol consumption or who have used drugs in the last 12 months have had more casual relationships.
- 3% (same among men as well as women) have ever had sexual intercourse with a same-sex partner and 1% have done so in the last 12 months (1.5% of men and less than 1% of women).
- 8% (17% of men and less than 1% of women) have had sexual intercourse, for which they paid with money or some other way (e.g. provided drugs, clothes, etc.). 2% of persons who had a sexual intercourse in the last 12 months had ever paid for sex, constituting 1.6% of the total sample. 71% of persons who have ever paid for sex have had a paid sexual intercourse with two or more partners. The average number of paid sexual partners in the last 12 months is 1.7. 3% have ever received payment for sexual intercourse.
- In the last five years, 5% have had sexual intercourse in a foreign country with a person they met there for the first time. The average number of sexual partners while abroad is 3.7 among these persons. The sexual partner is most often from a country in Europe.
- In the last five years, 4% have had sexual intercourse in Estonia with a person they met here for the first time but who usually lives abroad. The average number of foreign sexual partners is 1.6. The sexual partner is most often from a country in Europe.
- 2% have had intercourse with a partner, whom they know to inject or who has injected drugs in their lifetime.
- 18% of people who have had sexual intercourse have had casual or long-term parallel relationships while they were in a sexual relationship with their last partner (e.g. cheated on their partner, affairs, etc.).
- 9% have ever participated in group sex, whereas 1% have participated in group sex in the last year. Persons who have participated in group sex have usually done so an average of 5.3 times in their lifetime. Based on the last group sex experience, the average number of partners who participated was 3.4.

Use of condoms

- 7% have always used a condom during intercourse with their steady partner in the last year. 17% used a condom during their last intercourse.

- 41% have always used a condom during intercourse with a casual partner in the last 12 months; 59% did not use a condom consistently, constituting 5% of the total sample. 51% used a condom during their last intercourse and 49% did not (constituting 4% of the total sample). Persons who had consumed alcohol more often in the last year were less likely to have used a condom in casual relationships. Persons who had used condoms during intercourse with casual partners have a more positive attitude towards condoms compared to those who did not use condoms in casual relationships.
- 77% used a condom consistently each time they paid for intercourse in the last 12 months. 85% used a condom during such last intercourse.
- Less than 1% has had sexual intercourse without a condom with an HIV-positive person in the last 12 months.
- 52% of persons, who have had intercourse in the last five years in a foreign country with a person they met there for the first time, always used a condom. 47% always used a condom during intercourse with a foreigner in Estonia.
- Condoms are most often not used during intercourse with a steady partner due to having one specific partner as well as mutual trust. Condoms are most often not used during intercourse with a casual partner due to not believing that the partner may have HIV or other sexually transmitted infections, or using a condom was just simply not considered.

HIV testing

- 53% have ever tested for HIV in their lifetime, including 16% who tested in the last year. 3% were tested for HIV for the very first time in the last 12 months.
- People who are prone to risky behaviour consider their chances of acquiring HIV to be higher.
- People who have been tested for HIV consider their chances of acquiring HIV to be higher.
- The testing rates are higher among those who are prone to risky behaviour in sexual relationships (several sexual partners, sexual intercourse with a casual partner). No association with the use of condoms were found, meaning that the testing rates are similar among those who used a condom during intercourse with a casual partner and those who did not.
- HIV test is commonly done by a specialised physician at an outpatient clinic or a hospital, constituting 44% of all ever tested persons.
- 5% have visited an HIV testing event and 3.6% then tested for HIV at the event.
- 75% of persons believe that there is no need for them to test for HIV. 48% of those persons do not consider testing necessary because they are not at risk of acquiring HIV, whereas 41% explain that they trust their partner/partners.
- 4% of respondents have been in a situation where they have been interested in being tested but have not done so. Most common reasons for that include lack of time and not knowing where to get tested for HIV.
- 1% of tested persons stated that the test result was positive, constituting 0.4% of the total sample.

Testing for sexually transmitted infections

- 39% have ever been tested for a sexually transmitted infection (other than HIV), including 8% who have been tested in the last 12 months.
- As with HIV testing, testing rates for sexually transmitted infections are also higher among those who are prone to risky behaviours in sexual relationships.
- Sexually transmitted infections which had been most commonly diagnosed among respondents were chlamydia (21% of those who had been tested in their lifetime and 8% of the total sample) and trichomoniasis (16% of those who had been tested and 5% of the total sample).

Vaccination against hepatitis B

- 24% have been vaccinated against hepatitis B, including 21% who knew they had received all vaccination rounds.