

Commission presents results of Eurobarometer on HIV/AIDS

Today in Brussels at an EU HIV/AIDS prevention round table, focussing on safer sex for young people, the Commission released results of the latest Eurobarometer on HIV/AIDS. The survey looks into public awareness and citizens' behaviour in the context of the AIDS epidemic. Although the level of awareness regarding HIV/AIDS is generally high, citizens from the Member States which joined the EU in 2004 tend to provide less correct answers. On average, most Europeans are aware of the risks of sharing needles, receiving infected blood or having unprotected sex. Most respondents also declare this led them to take precautions when having sexual intercourse, and seeking stability in the choice of partners. However, misconceptions still remain: for instance, only 40% of respondents know it is not possible to be infected by HIV when kissing on the mouth.

"We must not lose sight of the fact that HIV/AIDS is still one of the biggest preventable killers world-wide" said European Health and Consumer Protection Commissioner Markos Kyprianou. "I am most worried about the decreasing attention for prevention. We have to promote education, the use of sterile needles and syringes, and especially safer sex as complacency leads in particular the young to underestimate the potential risk. The Eurobarometer shows some progress in raising awareness of citizens on HIV/AIDS prevention, but more needs to be done, in particular to inform the citizens of new EU Member States, where the epidemic is still strong, and which border with countries where the epidemic is on the rise."

Good knowledge but some die-hard misunderstandings

Almost half (around 45%) of respondents think it is possible to be infected by sharing glasses or toilet seats with, donating blood to or taking care of HIV-positive or AIDS patients. However, the vast majority of respondents are aware it is not risky to eat a meal prepared by infected persons, shake their hand or handle objects they have touched. While most respondents recognise the key role of safer sex, and state that they practice it, less and less EU-15 citizens declare they take precautions when compared to the 2002 Eurobarometer survey.

EU action in HIV/AIDS prevention

On 8 September 2004 the Commission adopted the Working Paper: Coordinated and Integrated Approach to Combat HIV/AIDS in the European Union and in its Neighbourhood¹. The Working Paper set out a number of concrete actions for the Commission to fulfil by the end of 2005. This was followed up on 15 December 2005 by the European Commission Communication on “combating HIV/AIDS within the European Union and in the neighbouring countries 2006-2009”.

The Communication sets the priority areas for action until the end of 2009, and identifies those areas where action at European level should be intensified in order to achieve the objectives set. The backbone of the Commission response is to support HIV/AIDS activities at the national level, but there are a number of areas where the European Union can make a useful contribution to address the HIV/AIDS challenge. One of these actions is prevention through awareness-raising and education targeted to young people. The HIV/AIDS Eurobarometer is in line with this as it contributes to a better understanding of EU citizens’ opinions and behaviours on HIV/AIDS prevention, and to boosting awareness on this issue.

The round table

To explore ways to raise awareness on HIV/AIDS prevention, in particular as far as safe sex is concerned, the Commission organised a stakeholder round table today in Brussels. Participants included youth organisations, representatives from Health promotion agencies from EU Member States, HIV/AIDS NGOs, advertising agencies, TV broadcasters and condom producers.

For further information please visit:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_publication/eurobarometers_en.htm

¹ http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_threats/com/aids/aids_en.htm