

# Health Care Poll

EDITOR

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## Majority Supports Trend to Allow More Prescription Drugs to be Sold Over-the-Counter, But Public Split about Risks, According to Survey of U.S. Adults

Half (51%) of U.S. adults believe the trend which allows people to buy more drugs over-the-counter (OTC) without a doctor's prescription is a good thing, compared to 28 percent who believe it is a bad thing. While many people support this trend, they are split about risk: two in five (40%) believe there is a serious risk to public health if more prescription drugs are made available over-the-counter, while 38 percent feel there is no serious risk.

These are some of the results of a Harris Interactive poll of 2,123 U.S. adults conducted online between October 20 and 22, 2004 for the Wall Street Journal Online's Health Industry Edition.

It appears that Americans will need to put their trust in someone, whether it's a government agency or another group, to make these decisions.

- While fully half of adults (49%) trust the FDA to make good decisions about which drugs should be available by prescription only, and which ones can be sold without a prescription, a quarter (25%) do not trust the FDA and another 27 percent are not sure.

While generally split about the safety of different prescription drugs, based on what people know or have heard, even greater numbers are *not sure* about their safety.

- Large percentages of adults are not sure if statins to treat people with high cholesterol (48%), ACE inhibitors to treat people with high blood pressure (47%), Cox-2 inhibitors to treat people with arthritis (52%) and inhaled corticosteroids to treat people with asthma (43%) are safe or unsafe to be sold without a prescription.

**TABLE 1**

### Is Trend To OTC A Good Or Bad Thing?

"In general, do you think the trend which allows people to buy more drugs over-the-counter without a doctor's prescription is a good thing or a bad thing?"

Base: All Adults

	Total
	%
Trend is a good thing	51
Trend is a bad thing	28
Not sure	21

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**TABLE 2**

**Serious Risk If More OTC Drugs?**

“Do you think there is a serious risk to the health of the public by making more of these drugs available over-the-counter without requiring a doctor’s prescription?”

Base: All Adults

	Total
	%
There is a serious risk	40
No serious risk	38
Not sure	22

**TABLE 3**

**Trust The Government (FDA) To Make Good Decisions About OTC?**

“Prescription drugs’ can only be obtained if you have a doctor’s prescription. ‘Over-the-counter drugs’ can be bought without a prescription. Some medications which used to be prescription drugs (examples include Tagamet, Zantac, Claritin and Prilosec) can now be bought over-the-counter without a prescription.

In general, do you trust the government agency, the Federal Drug Administration (or FDA), to make good decisions about which drugs should be available only with a prescription and which ones can be sold without a prescription?”

Base: All Adults

	Total
	%
Trust the FDA	49
Do not trust the FDA	25
Not sure	27

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100 percent due to rounding.

**TABLE 4**

**Perception Of Safety Of Various Drugs If OTC**

“Based on what you know or have heard, do you think the following types of prescription drugs are probably safe or unsafe to be sold without a prescription?”

Base: All Adults

		Safe	Unsafe	Not Sure
Statins to treat people with high cholesterol	%	27	25	48
ACE inhibitors to treat people with high blood pressure	%	25	29	47
Cox-2 inhibitors to treat people with arthritis	%	25	24	52
Inhaled corticosteroids to treat people with asthma	%	34	24	43

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100 percent due to rounding.

Downloadable PDFs of Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Polls are posted at [http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters\\_wsj.asp](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters_wsj.asp).



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## Methodology

This poll was conducted online in the U.S. between October 20 and 22, 2004 among a nationwide cross section of 2,123 adults. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, income and region were weighted where necessary to align with population proportions. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

In theory, with probability samples of this size, one could say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire U.S. adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in all polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. They include refusals to be interviewed (nonresponse), question wording and question order, interviewer bias, weighting by demographic control data and screening (e.g., for likely voters). It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. This online sample was not a probability sample.

*These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.*

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## About the Survey

The Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll is an exclusive poll that is published in the award-winning Health Industry Edition of The Wall Street Journal Online at [www.wsj.com/health](http://www.wsj.com/health).



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## About The Wall Street Journal Online

The Wall Street Journal Online at WSJ.com, published by Dow Jones & Company (NYSE: DJ; www.dowjones.com), offers authoritative analysis, breaking news and commentary from top industry journalists. Launched in 1996, the Online Journal is the largest paid subscription news site on the Web, with more than 689,000 subscribers world-wide. The Online Journal provides in-depth business news and financial information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with insight and analysis, including breaking business and technology news and analysis from around the world. It draws on the Dow Jones network of more than 1,500 reporters and editors – the largest staff of business and financial journalists in the world. For the second consecutive year in 2003, the Online Journal received a WebAward for the “Best Newspaper Web Site” and was also cited by Yahoo! Internet Life magazine as the “Best Business News” site (2002 & 2001).

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