

Health Care Poll

EDITOR

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Most of the American Public, Including a Majority of Parents, Believe that Childhood Obesity in the U.S. Is a Major Problem

Majorities look to both schools and the government to help fight issues contributing to the epidemic

More than three in four (77%) U.S. adults, including 70 percent of parents and guardians with children aged 12 and under, believe that childhood obesity in the United States is a major problem. The American public also believes that the rising rate of childhood obesity is both a public health problem and an issue of personal responsibility, and many (86%) agree that this epidemic will lead to higher health care costs for all Americans.

These are some of the results of a Harris Interactive poll of 2,387 U.S. adults conducted online between February 4 and 8, 2005 for the Wall Street Journal Online's Health Industry Edition.

Who's responsible?

A large majority (86%) of adults believe parents who do not pay enough attention to their children's eating habits, rather than the food industry's marketing and advertising, are responsible for children's weight problems. However, many do not believe the food industry is exempt as more than two-thirds (68%) of adults say the industry's advertising directed toward children is a major contributor to the rising rate of childhood obesity.

The American public is looking to both schools and government to help fight the childhood obesity battle

More than four in five (83%) adults believe public schools need to do a better job of limiting children's access to unhealthy foods like snack foods, sugary soft drinks and fast food. In addition, majorities not only want the government to react to companies who mislead consumers, but also want the government to take some proactive measures to regulate food industry practices.

- Nearly three in five (68%) adults believe the government should take companies to court if they mislead children and their parents about the nutritional value of the foods they sell.
- 55 percent believe the government should play a more active role in regulating the types of marketing and advertising that the food industry directs toward children.

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TABLE 1

Public Concern Regarding Childhood Obesity

“Based on what you know or have heard, do you believe that *childhood* obesity in the U.S. is...?”

Base: All adults

	All Adults	Parent or Guardian of Child Aged 12 and Under
	%	%
A major problem	77	70
A minor problem	21	27
Not a problem at all	2	3

TABLE 2

Public Perceptions Regarding Childhood Obesity

“How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?”

Base: All Adults

	All Adults			Parent or Guardian of Child Aged 12 and Under		
	Agree Strongly/Somewhat	Disagree Strongly/Somewhat	Not Sure	Agree Strongly/Somewhat	Disagree Strongly/Somewhat	Not Sure
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Obesity among children will lead to higher health care costs for all Americans.	86	7	6	85	8	7
If children in the U.S. are becoming obese it's because parents are not paying enough attention to their eating habits, not because of the food industry's marketing and advertising.	83	14	4	86	10	4
Public schools should do more to limit children's access to unhealthy foods like snack foods, sugary soft drinks and fast food.	83	14	3	84	12	5
Advertising by the food industry that is directed towards children is a major contributor to the rising rate of childhood obesity.	68	27	5	69	24	7
The government should take companies to court if they mislead children and their parents about the nutritional value of the foods they sell.	58	38	4	64	32	4
The government should play a more active role in regulating the types of marketing and advertising that the food industry directs toward children.	55	41	4	55	38	7

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

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Downloadable PDFs of Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Polls are posted at http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters_wsj.asp.

Methodology

This poll was conducted online in the U.S. between February 4 and 8, 2005 among a nationwide cross section of 2,387 adults aged 18 and over, of whom 481 are parents or guardians of children aged 12 and under. 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 for the overall sample have a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points. Sampling error for the results of the parents or guardians of children aged 12 and under is plus or minus 7 percentage points of what they would be if the entire U.S. adult population of parents or guardians of children aged 12 and under had been polled with complete accuracy. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. This includes refusals to be interviewed (non-response), question wording and question order, and weighting. 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.

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.

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).

About Dow Jones & Company

In addition to The Wall Street Journal and its international and online editions, Dow Jones & Company (NYSE: DJ; dowjones.com) also publishes Barron's and the Far Eastern Economic Review, Dow Jones Newswires, Dow Jones Indexes and the Ottaway group of community newspapers. Dow Jones is co-owner with Reuters Group of Factiva, with Hearst of SmartMoney and with NBC of the CNBC television operations in Asia and Europe. Dow Jones also provides news content to CNBC and radio stations in the U.S.



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About Harris Interactive

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To become a member of the Harris Poll OnlineSM and be invited to participate in future online surveys, visit www.harrispollonline.com.

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