

Large Majorities Support More Access to Birth Control Information, and Agree that it is a Good Way to Prevent Abortions

However, the public is divided on teen access to birth control without parental knowledge

A new Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll finds that large majorities of U.S. adults tend to agree that people should have more access to information about birth control and that birth control is a good way to prevent abortions. Interestingly, Catholics appear to be on the same page as the general public in regards to these issues. The survey also explores American's perception of how the United States compares to Europe when it comes to unplanned pregnancies and access to birth control.

These are some of the results of a Harris Interactive online survey of 2,689 U.S. adults conducted between June 9 and 13, 2006 for The Wall Street Journal Online's Health Industry Edition.

U.S. compared to Europe

According to the poll, almost half (47%) of all adults think the percentage of unplanned U.S. pregnancies is higher compared to European countries like England, France and Germany, while 30 percent say it is about the same, and only seven percent think this percentage is lower. However, when asked how the U.S.'s access to birth control measures up to European's, about six in 10 said the U.S.' access to it is about the same (29%) or better (29%).

Birth control

Most adults tend to agree that people should have more access to information about birth control options (89%), and that providing people with access to birth control is a good way to prevent abortions (81%). Furthermore:

- Majorities tend to agree that access to birth control should not be limited by someone's ability to pay for it (73%).
- Support for access to contraceptives by teenagers is more divided; a 46% to 41% plurality said teens should be allowed access to contraception without their parents' knowledge. Two-third of those polled agreed that abstinence is the best option for protecting teens from unwanted pregnancies, compared with 25% who disagreed.

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- Over half (58%) of adults tend to agree that the “morning after pill” should be easily available in all pharmacies, while roughly a quarter (26%) agree that if a pharmacist, for moral or religious reasons, prefers not to dispense birth control, he or she should not be required to do so. Most people (62%) do not think pharmacists should have this right.

Birth control and religion

- Born-again Christians are the most likely to support abstinence to protect teens from unwanted pregnancies (89% tend to agree), and – unlike all other religious groups in the survey – are least likely to support having the “morning after pill” easily accessible in all pharmacies (only 39% tend to agree).
- The attitudes of Catholics are almost identical to those of all U.S. adults on all these issues. Unlike the Catholic hierarchy, they are strongly supportive of easily accessible information about birth control (88%) and of the availability of the “morning after pill” (53%).

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

TABLE 1
Percentage Of Unplanned Pregnancies In The United States Compared To European Countries

“Based on what you know or have heard, compared with European countries like England, France and Germany, do you think the percentage of U.S. pregnancies that are unplanned is higher, lower or about the same?”

Base: All Adults

	Total
	%
Higher	47
Lower	7
About the same	30
Not sure	16

TABLE 2
Access To Birth Control In The United States Compared To Other Countries

“Based on what you know or have heard, compared to European countries like England, France and Germany, how would you compare Americans’ access to birth control?”

Base: All Adults

	Total
	%
Americans have better access to birth control	29
Americans have worse access to birth control	25
Americans’ access to birth control is about the same	29
Not sure	17

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TABLE 3A

Agree/Disagree With Eight Statements About Birth Control

“Please indicate whether you tend to agree or disagree with the following statements.”

Base: All Adults

		Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Not Sure
People should have more access to information about birth control options.	%	89	4	7
Providing people with access to birth control is a good way to prevent abortions.	%	81	9	10
Access to birth control should not be limited by someone’s ability to pay for it.	%	73	19	9
Abstinence is the best option for protecting teens from unwanted pregnancies.	%	66	25	9
The “morning after pill” should be easily available in all pharmacies.	%	58	26	16
Teens should be allowed access to birth control without their parents’ knowledge.	%	46	41	13
If a pharmacist, for moral or religious reasons, prefers not to dispense birth control he or she should not be required to do so.	%	26	62	12
It’s too easy to get birth control in the U.S.; tighter restrictions are needed as to how and when it is used.	%	11	74	15

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

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TABLE 3B

Those Who Agree With Eight Statements About Birth Control – By Religion

“Please indicate whether you tend to agree or disagree with the following statements.”
 Summary of “Tend to Agree”

Base: All Adults

	Total	Religious Affiliation									
		Catholic	Protestant	Baptist	Methodist	Lutheran	Episcopalian	Presbyterian	Jewish	Atheist/ Agnostic	Born-again Christian*
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
People should have more access to information about birth control options.	89	88	91	89	96	90	98	86	96	95	85
Providing people with access to birth control is a good way to prevent abortions.	81	81	81	75	89	79	92	81	85	89	75
Access to birth control should not be limited by someone’s ability to pay for it.	73	71	74	72	77	71	72	72	84	78	72
Abstinence is the best option for protecting teens from unwanted pregnancies.	66	68	76	85	74	59	70	72	60	45	89
The “morning after pill” should be easily available in all pharmacies.	58	53	53	42	67	50	71	63	83	88	39
Teens should be allowed access to birth control without their parents’ knowledge.	46	47	37	33	46	36	58	40	65	65	29
If a pharmacist, for moral or religious reasons, prefers not to dispense birth control he or she should not be required to do so.	26	27	27	32	25	17	12	13	18	12	43
It’s too easy to get birth control in the US, tighter restrictions are needed as to how and when it is used.	11	15	13	18	12	7	7	12	5	5	19

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

* Those who answered “yes” indicating they are Born-again Christians may also have other religious affiliations.

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Methodology

Harris Interactive conducted this online survey within the United States between June 9 and 13, 2006 among a national cross section of 2,689 adults, ages 18 years and over. Figures for age, gender, 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.

All surveys are subject to several sources of error. These include: sampling error (because only a sample of a population is interviewed); measurement error due to question wording and/or question order, deliberately or unintentionally inaccurate responses, nonresponse (including refusals), interviewer effects (when live interviewers are used) and weighting.

With one exception (sampling error) the magnitude of the errors that result cannot be estimated. There is, therefore, no way to calculate a finite "margin of error" for any survey and the use of these words should be avoided.

With pure probability samples, with 100 percent response rates, it is possible to calculate the probability that the sampling error (but not other sources of error) is not greater than some number. With pure probability samples of 2,689 adults, one could say with a ninety-five percent probability that the results have a sampling error of +/- 3 percentage points. Sampling error for sub-bases is higher and varies. However that does not take other sources of error into account. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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.

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