

More Adults This Year See Childhood Obesity As Major Problem in the U.S.

More than nine in 10 adults say parents need to lead by example by being physically active themselves and encouraging their children to be physically active

A new Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll finds that a growing number of U.S. adults see childhood obesity as a problem in the U.S., with 84 percent calling it a “major problem,” up from 77 percent from 2005. However, among those who are a parent or guardian of a child aged 12 and under, only 74 percent say it is a major problem (compared to 70% in 2005).

These are some of the results of a Harris Interactive online survey of 2,078 U.S. adults, ages 18 years and over, of whom 432 are parents or guardians of children age 12 and under, conducted between June 26 and 28, 2006 for The Wall Street Journal Online’s Health Industry Edition (www.wsj.com/health).

The poll found that 81 percent of adults agree¹ that children are becoming obese because parents aren’t paying enough attention to their’ eating habits, not because of the food industry’s marketing and advertising. Another 83 percent agree¹ that public schools should do more to limit students’ access to unhealthy foods, like snack foods, sugary soft drinks and fast food. About nine in 10 (89%) say that obesity among children will lead to higher health care costs for all Americans.

U.S. adults are divided on the government’s role in addressing the issue. Just over half (55%) say the government should take companies to court if they mislead children and their parents about the nutritional value of foods, while 39% disagree². Fifty-three percent say the government should play a more active role in regulating the food industry’s marketing toward children, compared with 42 percent who disagree². Likewise, only a third (34%) of adults agree¹ that local governments should use zoning regulations to limit fast-food restaurants near schools, compared with 61% who disagree².

The poll also shows a strong majority of adults believe more physical activity is part of the solution: Vast majorities say public schools should do more to promote regular exercise (93%) and parents should lead by example by being physically active themselves and encouraging their children to be physically active (94%).

¹ Agree strongly or somewhat.

² Disagree strongly or somewhat.

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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 12 and Under
		%	%
A major problem	2005	77	70
	2006	84	74
A minor problem	2005	21	27
	2006	15	21
Not a problem at all	2005	2	3
	2006	2	4

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

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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 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.	2005	86	7	6	85	8	7
	2006	89	5	6	86	7	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.	2005	83	14	4	86	10	4
	2006	81	14	5	82	12	5
Public schools should do more to limit children's access to unhealthy foods like snack foods, sugary soft drinks and fast food.	2005	83	14	3	84	12	5
	2006	83	13	4	83	14	3
Advertising by the food industry that is directed towards children is a major contributor to the rising rate of childhood obesity.	2005	68	27	5	69	24	7
	2006	65	31	4	67	29	4
The government should take companies to court if they mislead children and their parents about the nutritional value of the foods they sell.	2005	58	38	4	64	32	4
	2006	55	39	5	55	37	7
The government should play a more active role in regulating the types of marketing and advertising that the food industry directs toward children.	2005	55	41	4	55	38	7
	2006	53	42	5	56	39	5
Local governments should use zoning regulations to limit fast food restaurants near schools.	2005	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2006	34	61	5	37	55	8
Public schools should do more to promote regular exercise, including regular recess	2005	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2006	93	3	5	93	2	5
Parents need to lead by example by being physically active themselves and encouraging their children to be physically active	2005	-	-	-	-	-	-
	2006	94	2	5	93	2	4

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

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TABLE 2B
Perceptions Regarding Childhood Obesity – Parent or Guardian of Child Age 12 and Under
 “How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?”

Base: Parent or guardian of child age 12 and under

	Agree Strongly/ Somewhat (Net)	Agree Strongly	Agree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly/ Somewhat (Net)	Disagree Somewhat	Disagree Strongly	Not Sure
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Advertising by the food industry that is directed towards children is a major contributor to the rising rate of childhood obesity.	67	28	39	29	20	9	4
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.	82	54	28	12	9	3	5
The government should play a more active role in regulating the types of marketing and advertising that the food industry directs toward children.	56	21	34	39	22	17	5
Obesity among children will lead to higher health care costs for all Americans.	86	64	22	7	4	3	7
Public schools should do more to limit children's access to unhealthy foods like snack foods, sugary soft drinks and fast food.	83	53	30	14	9	4	3
The government should take companies to court if they mislead children and their parents about the nutritional value of the foods they sell.	55	24	31	37	21	17	7
Local governments should use zoning regulations to limit fast food restaurants near schools.	37	14	23	55	27	28	8
Public schools should do more to promote regular exercise, including regular recess.	93	76	17	2	1	1	5
Parents need to lead by example by being physically active themselves and encouraging their children to be physically active.	93	81	12	2	2	*	4

Note: Percentages may not add up to exactly 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

Harris Interactive conducted this online survey within the United States between June 26 and 28, 2006 among 2,078 adults, ages 18 years and over, of whom 432 are parents or guardians of children age 12 and under. 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 2,078 adults, one could say with a ninety-five percent probability that the results have a sampling error of +/- 3 percentage points. 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.

About The Wall Street Journal Online

The Wall Street Journal Online at WSJ.com, published by Dow Jones & Company (NYSE: DJ; www.dowjones.com), is the largest paid subscription news site on the Web. Launched in 1996, the Online Journal continues to attract quality subscribers that are at the top of their industries, with 761,000 subscribers world-wide as of Q1, 2006.

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 nearly 1,900 business and financial news staff—the largest network of business and financial journalists in the world. The Online Journal also



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The Online Journal offers three industry-specific verticals: the award-winning Health, Media & Marketing and now Law. Health offers authoritative analysis, breaking news and commentary from top industry journalists. Media & Marketing is designed for professionals in the advertising, marketing, entertainment and media industries. Law is designed to provide law firms and attorneys timely information on events and trends important to the legal market. Subscribers to all also get access to the full content of the Online Journal.

In 2005, the Online Journal was awarded a Codie Award for Best Online News Service for the second consecutive year, and its Health Industry Edition was awarded Best Online Science or Technology Service for the third consecutive year. In 2004, the Online Journal received an Eppy Award for Best Internet Business Service over 1 million monthly visitors.

The Wall Street Journal Online network includes CareerJournal.com, OpinionJournal.com, StartupJournal.com, RealEstateJournal.com and CollegeJournal.com.

About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive is the 13th largest and fastest-growing market research firm in the world. The company provides research-driven insights and strategic advice to help its clients make more confident decisions which lead to measurable and enduring improvements in performance. Harris Interactive is widely known for The Harris Poll, one of the longest running, independent opinion polls and for pioneering online market research methods. The company has built what could conceivably be the world's largest panel of survey respondents, the Harris Poll Online. Harris Interactive serves clients worldwide through its United States, Europe and Asia offices, its wholly-owned subsidiary Novatris in France and through a global network of independent market research firms. The service bureau, HISB, provides its market research industry clients with mixed-mode data collection, panel development services as well as syndicated and tracking research consultation. More information about Harris Interactive may be obtained at www.harrisinteractive.com.

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