

## Public's Opinion of FDA Shows Room for Improvement

*Less than half believe FDA is doing a good job on most tasks*

**ROCHESTER, N.Y. – April 30, 2009** – A new Harris Interactive/HealthDay poll finds the reputation of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has improved since a similar survey conducted a year ago in April 2008. For example, positive ratings for managing prescription drug recalls or withdrawals increased from 39% to 53%. However, most people still give the FDA negative ratings on ensuring the safety of imported food (56%) and drugs (52%), and on getting new drugs to the market more quickly (54%).

According to U.S. adults, the two top priorities for the FDA are ensuring the safety of food eaten in the U.S. (59%) and ensuring the safety and efficacy of new prescription drugs (37%). On both of these, people's opinions of the FDA are divided – 48% positive to 49% negative on food, and 47% to 47% on the safety and efficacy of new drugs.

These are some of the results of a Harris Interactive/HealthDay Poll conducted online within the United States between April 13 and 15, 2009 among a national cross section of 2,495 adults age 18 and over.

According to a recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), food safety has not improved in the past three years. Approximately 76 million people in the U.S. suffer from food borne illnesses each year, of which 300,000 are hospitalized and 5,000 die. The White House notes that the average number of outbreaks attributed to produce and other foods average 350 per year, compared to only 100 per year in the early 1990's. The FDA currently has the resources to inspect only about 7,000 of the 150,000 food processing plants and warehouses each year.

Dr. Margaret Hamburg, recently appointed as Commissioner of the FDA by President Obama, has her work cut out for her, but things seem to be heading in the right direction. Obama created a Food Safety Working Group to examine and upgrade food safety laws and is investing in the FDA to substantially increase the number of food inspectors and modernize food safety labs. The FDA took a more proactive approach recently in issuing a blanket warning about possible pistachio contamination upon first suspicion, rather than waiting for final investigation results.

Food recalls are not always clear to the public. Many people remember the 2009 recall of peanut products (90%), and the 2006 recall of spinach (63%), however, over half (56%) remember a recall of tomatoes in 2008. Tomatoes were under investigation in this outbreak but never officially recalled. The outbreak turned out to be due to jalapeño peppers, and only a third (34%) of adults remembers this incident.

Last year, the public gave the FDA its lowest rating in five years for ensuring the safety and efficacy of new prescription drugs (35% positive/58% negative). According to Humphrey Taylor, Chairman of The Harris Poll, "Perceptions of drug safety have gone up and down. As stories break about drug problems – and Vioxx® comes to mind—those numbers change. We seem to have recovered from the low figures of last year." He continued, "Every time you get a food recall, you get a huge blip in public opinion. Those kinds of stories on food safety and drug safety really do have a big impact."

**TABLE 1  
RATING OF FDA ON 8 FUNCTIONS**

“Based on what you know or have heard, how good a job do you think the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) does on . . . ?”

Base: All adults

		<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Fair</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>
Managing food recalls when safety concerns arises	%	14	42	26	14	4
Managing prescription drug recalls or withdrawals when safety concerns arise	%	11	43	28	12	7
Ensuring the safety of the food eaten in the United States	%	10	38	33	16	4
Ensuring the safety as well as the efficacy of new prescription drugs	%	8	39	33	14	6
Monitoring the safety of prescription drugs after they are approved and are being prescribed	%	8	39	30	16	7
Ensuring that prescription drugs come to market more quickly	%	6	31	31	23	9
Ensuring the safety of the food imported into the United States	%	6	32	35	21	6
Ensuring the safety of prescription drugs that are manufactured outside the United States	%	6	29	30	22	13

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

**TABLE 2**  
**RATING OF FDA ON 8 FUNCTIONS – TRENDS FROM PREVIOUS YEARS**

“Based on what you know or have heard, how good a job do you think the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) does on . . . ?”

Base: All adults

			<b>Positive*</b>	<b>Negative**</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>
Managing food recalls when safety concerns arises	2009	%	56	40	4
Managing prescription drug recalls or withdrawals when safety concerns arise	2008	%	39	53	8
	2009	%	53	40	3
Ensuring the safety of the food eaten in the United States	2009	%	48	49	4
Ensuring the safety as well as the efficacy of new prescription drugs	2004	%	56	37	7
	2006	%	36	58	6
	2007	%	45	49	6
	2008	%	35	58	7
	2009	%	47	47	6
Monitoring the safety of prescription drugs after they are approved	2009	%	47	46	7
Ensuring that prescription drugs come to market more quickly	2008	%	30	60	10
	2009	%	37	54	9
Ensuring the safety of the food imported into the United States	2009	%	38	56	6
Ensuring the safety of prescription drugs that are manufactured outside the United States	2008	%	26	62	12
	2009	%	35	52	13

\*Excellent or good.

\*\*Fair or poor.

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

**TABLE 3**  
**TWO MOST IMPORTANT PRIORITIES FOR FDA**

“Which of these do you believe should be the top two priorities for the FDA? Please select two responses.”

Base: All adults

	<b>Total</b>
	%
Ensuring the safety of the food eaten in the United States	59
Ensuring the safety as well as the efficacy of new prescription drugs	37
Ensuring the safety of the food imported into the United States	30
Monitoring the safety of prescription drugs after they are approved and are being prescribed	25
Managing food recalls when safety concerns arises	15
Ensuring the safety of prescription drugs that are manufactured outside the United States	14
Ensuring that prescription drugs come to market more quickly	11
Managing prescription drug recalls or withdrawals when safety concerns arise	9

Note: Total adds to 200% because respondents gave two answers.

**TABLE 4**  
**DOES FDA APPROVE NEW DRUGS TOO QUICKLY**

“In general, do you think the FDA tends to approve new prescription drugs too quickly (i.e., before they are proven to be safe), too slowly (i.e., when getting them on the market sooner could have helped more people) or at the right speed (i.e., optimal for everyone’s safety)?”

Base: All adults

	<b>Total</b>
	%
Too slowly	35
Too quickly	19
At the right speed	18
Not sure	28

**TABLE 5  
AWARENESS OF FDA RECALLS**

“Are you aware of the FDA recalling any of the following items in the past three years?”

Base: All adults

	<b>Total</b>
	<b>%</b>
Peanut butter	90
Dog and/or cat food	68
Spinach	63
Tomatoes**	56
Jalapeño peppers	34
Toothpaste	20
Cough medicine*	13
Milk*	8
None of these	5

\*There were no recalls of these.

\*\*Production was stopped, but not officially recalled.

**TABLE 6  
CONFIDENCE IN SAFETY OF VARIOUS MEDICAL PRODUCTS AND FOODS**

“Based on what you know or have heard, how confident are you in the safety of the following items?”

Base: All adults

		<b>Very Confident</b>	<b>Somewhat Confident</b>	<b>Not Very Confident</b>	<b>Not At All Confident</b>
Over-the-counter medications like antacids, sleep aids, or cough and cold medicine	%	25	61	10	4
Prescription drugs, including generic and brand name drugs	%	24	62	10	5
Herbal remedies or nutritional supplements	%	14	48	29	9
Packaged or prepared foods	%	19	64	13	4
Fresh fruit, vegetables and nuts	%	21	62	13	3
Meat	%	17	64	14	5

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

## Methodology

Harris Interactive conducted this online survey within the United States between April 13 and 15, 2009 among a national cross section of 2,495 adults age 18 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 sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and

## Harris Interactive | HealthDay Poll

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the U.S. adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to be invited to participate in the Harris Interactive online research panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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

### **About Harris Interactive**

Harris Interactive is a global leader in custom market research. With a long and rich history in multimodal research that is powered by our science and technology, we assist clients in achieving business results. Harris Interactive serves clients globally through our North American, European and Asian offices and a network of independent market research firms. For more information, please visit [www.harrisinteractive.com](http://www.harrisinteractive.com).

### **About HealthDay**

HealthDay is a daily health news service, a division of ScoutNews, LLC, a Norwalk, Conn.-based news and information company. The articles produced by HealthDay's journalists and editors are licensed to media companies, hospitals, clinics, group practices, managed care organizations, publishers, non-profit organizations, and government agencies.

### **Press Contacts:**

Harris Interactive  
Corporate Communications  
585-272-8400  
[press@harrisinteractive.net](mailto:press@harrisinteractive.net)

HealthDay  
Dan McKillen  
203-855-1400, ext. 100  
[dmckillen@healthday.com](mailto:dmckillen@healthday.com)