



A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Unit

Obesity Tops List of Biggest Health Problems For Kids in 2008

Childhood obesity tops the 2008 list of the biggest health problems for children in an annual public survey conducted by the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital's National Poll on Children's Health. This contrasts with the [2007 survey](#), in which obesity was rated third, behind smoking and drug abuse. Those problems remain in the top 3 in 2008.

In April 2008, the Poll asked adults to rate 20 different health concerns for children living in their communities. Figure 1 presents the top ten children's health concerns rated as a "big problem" in 2008.

Figure 1. Top 10 U.S. Children's Health Concerns - 2008

Health Concern, % Rated as "Big Problem"
1. Childhood obesity, 35%
2. Drug abuse, 33%
3. Smoking, 32%
4. Bullying, 28%
5. Internet safety, 27%
6. Child abuse and neglect, 25%
7. Teen pregnancy, 24%
8. Alcohol abuse, 23%
9. Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), 21% Sexually transmitted infection, 21%
10. Chemicals in the environment, 19% Not enough opportunities for physical activity, 19%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, April 2008

Health issues for children *not* ranked in the top ten included: driving accidents, school violence, depression, asthma, eating disorders, neighborhood safety, autism and suicide.

Adults who do not have children in their households were *more* likely to rate drug abuse, smoking and tobacco use, Internet safety, and sexually transmitted infections as big problems than were parents.

Race/ Ethnicity Differences in Ratings

Differences in the ratings of the top 3 health problems for children by race/ethnicity are shown in Figure 2. As indicated in last year's poll, black adults continue to rate teen pregnancy as the chief health problem for youth in their communities, with 35% reporting it as a big problem compared with only 21% among white adults, and 33% among Hispanic adults.

Report Highlights

- **Obesity is now rated by adults as the top health problem for children, after being rated third in 2007.**
- **New health concerns in the top 10 include: bullying, attention deficit disorder, chemicals in the environment, and not having enough opportunities for physical activity.**
- **According to black adults, teen pregnancy remains the #1 health problem for children in their community.**

Figure 2. Top 3 U.S. Children's Health Concerns by Race/Ethnicity, % Rated as "Big Problem"- 2008

Whites
1. Childhood obesity, 34%
2. Drug abuse, 29%
2. Smoking and tobacco use, 29%
Blacks
1. Teen pregnancy, 35%
1. Drug abuse, 35%
3. Childhood obesity, 33%
Hispanics
1. Smoking, 52%
2. Drug abuse, 50%
3. Bullying, 41%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, April 2008

Hispanic adults rated smoking and tobacco use as the number one health problem for children, with 52% reporting it as a big problem compared with only 29% of whites and blacks. Drug abuse was commonly rated as a big health problem for children by all groups, but Hispanics (50%) were more likely to rate it as a big problem compared with 29% of whites and 35% of blacks. Bullying reached the top 3 child health concerns among Hispanic adults (41%), somewhat higher than among blacks (26%) and whites (25%).

Ratings by Household Income

The National Poll on Children's Health found that adults from low-income households (<\$30,000 per year) saw drug abuse, smoking and tobacco use, and teen pregnancy as the biggest health concerns for children. In contrast, high-income households (>\$100,000 per year) were more likely to see Internet safety as a big problem for children in their community (Figure 3), along with obesity and drug abuse.

Compared with adults from high-income households, nearly twice as many adults in the lowest income group rated drug abuse as a big problem for children in their community.

Figure 3. Top 3 U.S. Children's Health Concerns by Household Income, % Rated as "Big Problem"- 2008

< \$30,000
1. Drug abuse, 43%
2. Smoking and tobacco use, 40%
2. Teen pregnancy, 33%
\$30,000 to <\$60,000
1. Childhood obesity, 35%
2. Drug abuse, 34%
3. Bullying, 31%
\$60,000 to <\$100,000
1. Childhood obesity, 38%
2. Smoking and tobacco use, 34%
3. Bullying, 29%
\$100,000 or more
1. Childhood obesity, 34%
2. Internet safety, 25%
3. Drug abuse, 22%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, April 2008

Bullying

Bullying is new to the list of top 10 biggest health problems for children in 2008, and it was rated similarly high (#4) by parents and adults without children in their households. Adults from low and middle-income households were more likely than the highest-income households to rate bullying as a big problem.

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), also called attention deficit disorder, was also new to the list of top 10 biggest health problems for children. AD/HD was a much greater concern for adults in the lowest income group (31%) than for adults in middle and highest income groups (14-19%), and was rated similarly by adults from the major race/ethnic groups.

Chemicals in the Environment

Environmental toxins also made the top 10 list of child health problems for the first time, largely because of concerns among Hispanic adults (33%) and adults in the lowest income group (25%).

Implications

This annual assessment of public concern about health problems facing children shows a shifting set of worries among adults about children in their communities. The main difference compared with last year's poll is that childhood obesity now is rated as the #1 concern. In addition, lack of opportunities for physical activity is one of the top 10 concerns, underscoring the importance placed on childhood obesity as a major problem in adults' minds. Of note, although other research has shown that Hispanic youth are at particularly high risk for obesity, this problem was rated lower by Hispanic adults than several other concerns.

Smoking and drug abuse remain major child health concerns among adults. Levels of concern about these issues are particularly higher among Hispanic adults, and among adults in the lowest income group.

Teen pregnancy remains the #1 concern among black adults regarding children in their communities. This rating reflects patterns of teen pregnancy across the country, which have recently increased again after a long decline among all race/ethnic groups.

Bullying, AD/HD, and chemicals in the environment are all new concerns in the top 10, reflecting adults' worries about a broad array of health problems for children — interpersonal, medical, and environmental. Hispanic adults are more concerned about bullying and environmental toxins in their communities than are other adults.

Overall, findings from this annual survey emphasize that different communities place varying importance on specific health issues. Efforts to address children's health issues may be most effective in communities where these issues are seen as being of great importance.

Data Source

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by Knowledge Networks, Inc, for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered from April 11-29 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults aged 18 and older (n=2,064) with and without children from the Knowledge Networks standing panel that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 53% among panel members contacted to participate.



Child Health Evaluation
and Research Unit

C.S. Mott Children's Hospital
National Poll on Children's Health
Director: Matthew M. Davis, MD, MAPP
Associate Director: Sarah J. Clark, MPH
Manager & Editor: Dianne C. Singer, MPH
Data Analyst: Amy Butchart, MPH
Contact us! Email: NPCH@med.umich.edu
www.med.umich.edu/mott/research/chearnpch.html

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