

# C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health

Child Health Evaluation  
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## Public Concern Rising About Childhood Obesity

For the second year in a row, childhood obesity is the biggest health problem for children in an annual nationwide survey conducted by the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital's National Poll on Children's Health. What has changed in 2009 about opinions regarding childhood obesity is that it now tops the list for Hispanics, blacks and whites. In the [2008 survey](#), childhood obesity was ranked 6th by Hispanics and 3rd by blacks as the biggest child health problem.

In May 2009, the Poll asked adults to rate 23 different health concerns for children living in their communities. Table 1 presents the top 10 children's health concerns rated as a "big problem" by adults in 2009.

**Table 1. Top 10 U.S. Children's Health Concerns - 2009**

Child Health Concern, % Rated as "Big Problem" in 2009
1. Childhood obesity, 42%
2. Drug abuse, 36%
3. Smoking and tobacco use, 32%
4. Bullying, 31%
5. Internet safety, 31%
6. Child abuse and neglect, 29%
7. Alcohol abuse, 26%
8. Stress, 26%
9. Not enough opportunities for physical activity, 25%
10. Teen pregnancy, 24%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Public concern of childhood obesity is on the rise. In 2007, 34% of adults rated child obesity as a big health problem and it ranked 3rd on the list. In 2008, 35% of adults rated it as a big problem and it was at the top of the list. In 2009, childhood obesity is again at the top of the list, now with 42% of adults rating it as a big problem.

Health issues for children *not* ranked in the top ten included: chemicals in the environment, driving accidents, sexually transmitted infections, school violence, depression, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, asthma, autism, eating disorders, neighborhood safety, dental problems, suicide and unsafe foods.

## Report Highlights

- More adults rate obesity as the top health problem for children in 2009 than in prior years.
- Beyond obesity, Hispanics, blacks, and whites disagree on top child health problems.
- More than one-quarter of adults now rate stress as a big child health problem.

## Rating Differences by Race/Ethnicity

Differences by race/ethnicity in adults' ratings of the top 3 health problems for children are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Top 3 U.S. Children's Health Concerns by Race/Ethnicity, % Rated as "Big Problem"- 2009**

Whites
1. Childhood obesity, 39%
2. Drug abuse, 35%
3. Internet safety, 30%
Blacks
1. Childhood obesity, 55%
2. Smoking and tobacco use, 44%
3. Teen pregnancy, 44%
Hispanics
1. Childhood obesity, 46%
2. Bullying, 37%
3. Child abuse and neglect, 37%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

Hispanic, white and black adults all rated childhood obesity as the #1 health problem for children. Internet safety was the 3rd biggest child health problem among whites (30%), while it was 5th among Hispanics (33%) and 10th among blacks (37%). Blacks rated smoking and teen pregnancy in their top 3, while smoking was 4th among whites (29%) and Hispanics (37%), and teen pregnancy was 11th among whites (20%) and 9th among Hispanics (26%). Hispanics rated bullying and child abuse & neglect in the top 3, both higher than among whites and blacks.

For the complete list of top 10 child health concerns rated by Hispanics (Table 4), blacks (Table 5) and whites (Table 6), see page 3.

## Ratings by Household Income

The National Poll on Children's Health found that adults from low-income households (<\$30,000 per year) rated smoking & tobacco use as the top child health concern, while the middle and highest income households (\$30,000 to >\$100,000) rated childhood obesity as the biggest health concern for children in their communities (Table 2).

**Table 3. Top 3 U.S. Children's Health Concerns by Household Income, % Rated as "Big Problem"- 2009**

<b>&lt; \$30,000</b>
1. Smoking and tobacco use, 43%
2. Drug abuse, 42%
3. Childhood obesity, 38%
<b>\$30,000 to &lt;\$60,000</b>
1. Childhood obesity, 44%
2. Internet safety, 35%
3. Drug abuse, 32%
<b>\$60,000 to &lt;\$100,000</b>
1. Childhood obesity, 44%
2. Drug abuse, 29%
3. Internet safety, 26%
<b>\$100,000 or more</b>
1. Childhood obesity, 46%
2. Drug abuse, 36%
3. Smoking and tobacco use, 32%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

## Internet Safety

Internet safety climbed within the top 3 biggest health problems for children for middle and upper middle-income households (\$30,000 up to \$100,000 per year) (Table 3). For the highest-income households (>\$100,000), Internet safety dropped from the 2nd biggest problem in 2008 to the 8th biggest child health problem in 2009. Lower-income households (<\$30,000) rated Internet safety as the 11th biggest child health problem.

## Stress

For the first time since the Poll has measured national public attitudes about child health problems, stress is now in the list of top 10 biggest health problems for children. Children's stress was rated a concern by more adults in the lowest-income group (36%) than by adults in middle- and highest-income groups (17%-21%), and was rated similarly by adults from the major race/ethnic groups.

In [July 2009](#), the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health found that stress from financial worries affects twice as many low-income children as highest-income children.

## Implications

Our annual poll of public concern about health problems facing children reveals consistent patterns over the years but also new worries among adults about kids in their communities.

Childhood obesity again ranks as the #1 child health concern, with about 2 of every 5 adults rating it as a big health problem—a greater proportion than in 2008. The difference this year is the uniformity of concern among adults of different racial/ethnic groups: Hispanics, blacks, and whites all rate childhood obesity as the #1 child health problem, whereas this was not the case in past years. The current level of agreement likely signals a rising level of concern about childhood obesity among adults across different communities, to the extent that it has now outpaced other concerns in past ratings such as teen pregnancy and drug abuse (blacks) and smoking, drug abuse and bullying (Hispanics).

Stress now ranks among the top 10 child health problems, and was especially of concern for children in lower-income communities. As we reported in [July 2009](#), levels of stress among children may relate to economic stresses faced by their families in the current economic downturn. More generally, the fact that stress rates so high in the list of child health problems is a reminder that most of the problems in the list are behavioral or psychological in nature. To address such problems successfully, children and families need not just access to medical and mental health care, but also guidance from community health and educational programs that cue healthy, protective behaviors and offer support when health problems arise.

### 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 in May 2009 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults aged 18 and older (n=2,017) 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 59% among panel members contacted to participate. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 to 4 percentage points for the main analysis. For results based on subgroups, the margin of error is higher.*



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**Table 4. Top 10 U.S. Children's Health Concerns  
Rated by Hispanics - 2009**

<b>Health Concern, % Rated by Hispanics as "Big Problem" in 2009</b>
1. Childhood obesity, 46%
2. Bullying, 37%
3. Child abuse and neglect, 37%
4. Smoking and tobacco use, 37%
5. Internet safety, 33%
6. Drug abuse, 32%
7. Alcohol abuse, 29%
8. Driving accidents, 27%
9. Teen pregnancy, 26%
10. School violence, 24%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

**Table 5. Top 10 U.S. Children's Health Concerns  
Rated by Blacks - 2009**

<b>Health Concern, % Rated by Blacks as "Big Problem" in 2009</b>
1. Childhood obesity, 55%
2. Smoking and tobacco use, 44%
3. Teen pregnancy, 44%
4. Sexually transmitted infections & HIV/AIDS, 41%
5. Drug abuse, 41%
6. Bullying, 40%
7. School violence, 40%
8. Child abuse and neglect, 40%
9. Not enough opportunities for physical activity, 38%
10. Internet safety, 37%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009

**Table 6. Top 10 U.S. Children's Health Concerns  
Rated by Whites - 2009**

<b>Health Concern, % Rated by Whites as "Big Problem" in 2009</b>
1. Childhood obesity, 39%
2. Drug abuse, 35%
3. Internet safety, 30%
4. Smoking and tobacco use, 30%
5. Bullying, 29%
6. Child abuse and neglect, 27%
7. Alcohol abuse, 25%
8. Stress, 25%
9. Chemicals in the environment, 22%
10. Teen pregnancy, 21%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2009