



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

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Parent Views on Medical Research: Safety of Vaccines & Medicines Top Priorities

Medical research for children has advanced rapidly over the last 50 years. As a result, fewer kids die from infectious diseases, and tremendous strides have been made in the treatment of certain childhood cancers. However, as threats of some diseases have faded, concerns have increased related to patients' safety and to links between the environment and children's health.

Parents continue to look to research to provide more benefits for children. In August 2010, the CS Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked parents to rate the importance of different types of medical research for children's health.

Parent Priorities for Children's Medical Research

Parents were asked about the importance of different areas of research for children's health. Nearly 9 in 10 parents rate research on the safety of vaccine and effectiveness and safety of medicines as very important for children's health (Table 1).

Table 1. Parent Ratings of the Importance of Medical Research Topics Regarding Children's Health

	% Very Important
1. Safety of vaccines	89%
2. Effectiveness and safety of medicines	88%
3. Things in the environment that can lead to health problems	72%
4. Foods that might protect against cancer	67%
5. New treatment for a rare childhood disease	66%
6. Foods that might cause cancer	64%
7. New treatment for a common childhood disease	64%
8. Leading causes of injuries in children	46%

Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2010

Research on the environment and on cancer and other childhood diseases are viewed as comparatively less important. Less than half of parents rate medical research on the leading causes of childhood injuries as very important.

Ratings of research importance do not differ by parents' race/ethnicity.

Report Highlights

- **Safety of vaccines and medicines top the list of children's medical research topics that parents view as very important.**
- **Research about environmental links to child health and research on cancer are viewed as more important than research on leading causes of injuries.**

Implications

Each year, hundreds of millions of public and private dollars are spent on medical research to improve the health of children – yet parents have little input regarding how those dollars should be spent.

In this Poll, parents overwhelmingly endorse the need for research on the safety of vaccines and medications given to children. Parental concerns about the safety of vaccines has increased markedly over the last decade, due to alleged (but later disproven) links between vaccines and autism and related concerns about mercury and other preservatives used in vaccines. For parents, assurances from health care providers and government officials that “vaccines are safe” have been insufficient. Rather, parents want more research about the safety of vaccines for their young children and adolescents.

Similarly, the safety and effectiveness of medications given to children is viewed by parents as a very important area of research. These views may be prompted by high-profile recalls of medications, or by recent reports suggesting that some common over-the-counter medicines are ineffective for kids. Clearly, parents recognize the importance of continuing research about medications, and see the potential for research to help them be better informed about the potential benefits and risks of treatments for their children.

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 on August 13 - September 7, 2010 to a randomly selected, stratified group of parents aged 18 and older (n=1,621) 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 57% among panel members contacted to participate. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2 to 3 percentage points, depending on the question.

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Director: Matthew M. Davis, MD, MAPP

Associate Director: Sarah J. Clark, MPH

Manager & Editor: Dianne C. Singer, MPH

Data Analyst: Amy T. Butchart, MPH

Contact us! <http://www.med.umich.edu/mott/npch>

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