



National Poll on Children's Health

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Medical Research Needs Kids, but Parents Not Aware of Opportunities

When children benefit from vaccinations, new medications, or new diagnostic tests, they are experiencing the advantages of medical research. Without adults and children taking part in medical research, few major advances in healthcare would be possible. Yet, prior estimates of children's participation in medical research have indicated that only about 1 in 20 families has a child who has taken part. Understanding parents' willingness to allow their children to participate in medical research, and under what conditions, may help develop research options that are more appealing to families.

Report Highlights

5% of parents say their children have taken part in medical research.

44% of parents would consider allowing their children to participate in medical research if their children had the disease being studied.

Parents who are aware of medical research opportunities are more likely to have their children take part in medical research if the research is related to an illness their children have.

In June 2013, the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents about past and future opportunities for children to participate in medical research. Parents were also asked how likely they would be to have their children participate in medical research if the research was related to a disease that their child had.

Awareness of Medical Research Opportunities for Children

Only 5% of parents say their children have ever participated in any type of medical research. Parents of children with chronic diseases are more likely to have had their children participate than parents of children without a chronic condition.

Among parents whose children have not participated in medical research, 4% indicate they have received an invitation for their child to participate; another 24% of parents recall seeing or hearing about opportunities for children to participate in medical research.

Children's Participation in Future Medical Research

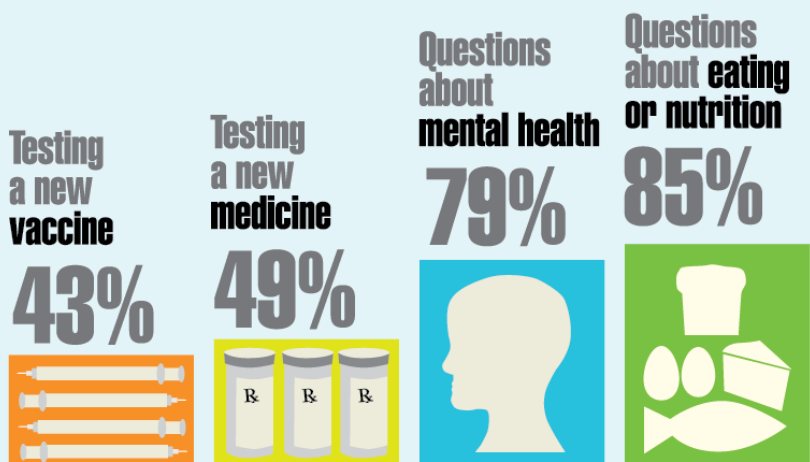
Overall, 44% of parents indicate they would consider allowing their children to participate in medical research if he/she had the disease being studied.

Nearly one-half of parents are willing to have their children take part in research that involves testing a new medicine or a new vaccine. More than three-quarters of parents are willing to have their children participate in research involving questions about mental health or eating or nutrition (see Figure 1).

Contact us

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.

Figure 1. **Proportion of Parents Willing to have Children Participate in Medical Research, by Type of Study***



* If child had the disease being studied.

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by GfK Custom Research, LLC (GfK), for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered in June 2013 to a randomly selected, stratified group of parents age 18 and older with a child age 0-17 (n=1,420) from GfK's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® 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 51% among the panel members contacted to participate. The margin of error is ± 1 to 3 percentage points and higher among subgroups.

Parents whose children have previously participated or are aware of opportunities for children to participate in medical research are more likely than other parents to be willing to have their children participate in medical research in the future, if their children have the disease being studied.

Parents are less likely to be willing to have their children participate in medical research as healthy volunteers; 1 in 5 parents say they would consider letting their children participate in medical research as a healthy volunteer, if the risks were low.

Implications

The National Poll on Children's Health has been measuring levels of participation by children in medical research since 2007. The proportion of families whose children have taken part in research has not changed over this time period – from 4% in 2007, to 5% in 2011, to 5% in this latest poll. At a time when adults across the country express concerns about cancer, diabetes, and the safety of medications and vaccines for children (see [NPCH Report on top research priorities](#)), it is critically important to have children and families who are willing to participate in research to address these questions. Five percent of families with children are unlikely enough to support such important research efforts.

On the other hand, nearly one-half of parents in this poll indicate that they would be willing to consider having their children participate in medical research if their children had the condition being studied. The willingness to have children take part differs by the type of study—higher for studies involving questions; lower for studies involving exposure to a new medicine or vaccine. Nonetheless, the high proportion of willing parents, compared with the low proportion of parents whose children have participated previously, is what can be called an “opportunity gap” in medical research for children.

To close this opportunity gap and increase the proportion of children advancing healthcare by taking part in medical studies, the research community will need to enhance its ability to reach parents with information about opportunities for children to participate, answer parents' questions about benefits and risks of participation, and potentially broaden the types of studies available. Many research universities, and the National Institutes of Health, are actively trying to expand medical research options for children—especially for children with chronic illnesses who stand to benefit so much from advances in care.

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