



National Poll on Children's Health

Parents Want Explanations, Not Scare Tactics, from the Media About Children's Health

Each year, billions of public and private dollars are spent on medical research about child health topics. When research studies are completed, results need to reach the people most responsible for keeping children healthy – parents. Information about research results is often spread throughout the media.

The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked parents for their opinions about how well the different media sources communicate results of child health research.

Media Coverage

Among this national sample of parents:

- 77% of parents like having a medical expert explain what the research means for their children.
 - 72% think media reports help parents know how to keep their children healthy.
- However:
- Only 51% of parents think media reports do a good job explaining how medical research may affect their children.

Chief Complaints

Parents had several criticisms of the way child health research is conveyed in the media:

- 82% think research results are contradictory – first they say one thing, then another.
- 60% believe media reports scare parents unnecessarily.
- 50% say health research reports are hard to understand.

Which Media Source is Best?

Parents disagreed about which media source does the best job in communicating child health information that is accurate, easy to understand, timely, and supported with expert opinions. About half of parents believe that health websites do the best job overall while 29% rate TV as the best overall source (Table 1).

Implications

Each day, parents are bombarded with media reports about the latest research findings – from new medicines to environmental hazards, and from rare diseases to the common cold. This report indicates that most parents understand that media reports about medical research CAN help them know how to keep their children healthy—but, many struggle to understand information they find confusing, contradictory and sometimes scary.

When looking for child health information that is accurate, understandable, and timely, a key finding of this poll is that parents look to medical experts to cut through the confusion and translate what research findings mean for their children. Whether parents seek health websites or come across a TV or newspaper report on child health research, effective media reports guide parents in understanding what research results mean in the real world.

Report Highlights

Only half of parents think media reports do a good job explaining how research affects their children.

Commonly, parents complain that media reports about children's health are contradictory, scary and hard to understand.

Parents believe that health websites are most accurate among media sources, but TV reaches them first with new information.

Table 1. Parent Opinions on the Strengths of Media Sources in Communicating for Child Health Research

	TV	Health websites	Other*
Information that is accurate	21%	61%	18%
Information that I can understand	36%	35%	29%
First to reach me with new results	53%	23%	24%
Expert opinion to help explain things	29%	50%	21%
BEST OVERALL	29%	51%	20%

* Other includes newspapers, magazines, radio & blogs
Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2011

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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 August-September 2011 to a randomly selected, stratified group of parents aged 18 or 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 60% among parent panel members contacted to participate. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2 to 3 percentage points.

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