Health apps are computer application programs on smartphones or tablets that offer interactive games and provide education or motivation about health topics. Most health apps are targeted to teens or adults, but their use among tweens (children 8-12 years old) is not well understood. The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of tweens about their experiences with and views on health apps.

Nearly half of parents (46%) have used a health app themselves, but only 5% of parents say their tween is using health apps. Most parents (71%) agree that using an app can help tweens develop good health behaviors. Parents’ views are mixed (56% agree, 44% disagree) on whether they believe tweens are more willing to learn about health through apps than from their parents.

Parents also recognize some potential problems with health apps for tweens. Two-thirds of parents (69%) are concerned about their tween being targeted by ads from health apps, while 72% agree that having children track what they eat can lead them to become too concerned about their weight or body image.

Despite these concerns, most parents are not against their tween using health apps. Only 19% of parents would not allow their tween to use an app that features games about health; 32% would not allow an app that gives tips or coaching about health; and 38% would not allow their tween to use an app that tracks health information. Parents of younger tweens (8-9 years), parents concerned about their child being targeted by ads, and parents who do not use health apps themselves are less likely to say they would allow their tween to use health apps.

Among parents whose tween currently uses health apps, 63% say that those health apps collect data about their tween. Nearly all think the data is seen by parents and the tween, while only 13% think advertisers see data from the health app.

Only 3% of parents say their tween’s health care provider has discussed using health apps. However, 69% of parents want help from providers, including recommending health apps for their tween (44%), telling parents if their tween has a health problem where an app could help (36%), looking at data from the app to see how their tween is doing (26%), and recommending the age their tween could start using apps (22%).

**Report Highlights**

1. 1 in 20 parents say their tween uses health apps.
2. 2 in 3 parents are concerned about their tween being targeted by ads from health apps.
3. Most parents want input from their tween's health care provider on using health apps, but only 3% have talked with their tween's provider.
4. 38% of parents would not allow their tween to use an app that tracks health information.
Healthy involves a varied diet and regular exercise, done in moderation. About how to be healthy, and how apps may be one strategy to emphasize that being healthy among subgroups. It is unclear whether providers recognize health apps as a topic of interest to parents to talk with a provider about this topic. Parents in this Mott Poll expressed a desire to get input about health apps from their child's health care provider, but only 3% had talked with a provider about this topic. The appropriateness of health apps for tweens is debatable for other reasons. Nearly three quarters of parents in this Mott Poll feel that having tweens track what they eat can lead them to become too concerned about their weight or body image. Before tweens begin using a health app that tracks food or calorie intake, parents should encourage their tween to talk about why they’re interested in tracking their food or calorie intake. Parents might consider using a similar health app for themselves, as a way to maintain a dialogue about tracking health data. This can lead to “teachable moments” that allow parents to reinforce the notion that people grow at different rates, and that being healthy does not mean the same weight or body shape for everyone.

Parents in this Mott Poll expressed a desire to get input about health apps from their tween’s health care provider, but only 3% had talked with a provider about this topic. It is unclear whether providers recognize health apps as a topic of interest to parents and tweens. In light of research that eating disorders can begin during the tween years, child health providers should be prepared to talk with parents and tweens about how to be healthy, and how apps may be one strategy to emphasize that being healthy involves a varied diet and regular exercise, done in moderation.