



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

## Summer Safety for 'Tweens' Home Alone

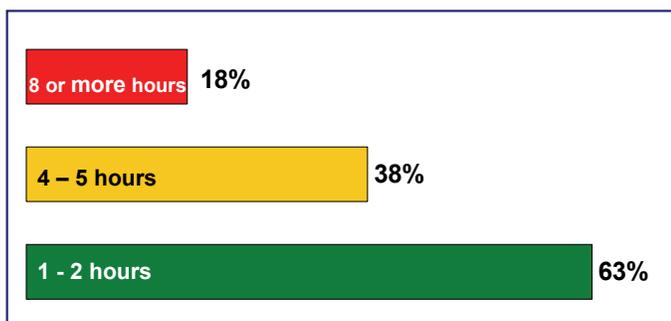
School is out, and millions of "tweens" (children age 11-13) will be left home alone by their parents for a couple hours, an afternoon or even the entire day. Leaving tweens home alone allows them to gain independence, but also presents unique challenges for parents.

There are no formal guidelines for parents to follow when it comes to leaving tweens at home by themselves. Because leaving tweens home alone is a common challenge for parents, the goal of this poll was to ask parents what they think is an appropriate age to leave a child home alone, how often they leave their children home alone, how much have they talked about safety issues, and how confident they are that their children will follow basic safety rules.

### Home Alone

In April 2008, the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked parents what is an acceptable age to leave a child home alone. On average, parents said that 11-12 years old was an appropriate age for child to be home alone for an hour or two. Among parents with children 11 to 13 years, nearly two-thirds have left their tweens home alone for an hour or two, and nearly 1 in 5 parents have left tweens at home alone for an entire day (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage of Parents Who Leave Their 11 to 13 Year Old Children Home Alone



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, April, 2008

## Report Highlights

- Nearly two-thirds of parents of "tweens" (age 11-13) have left them home alone for 1-2 hours.
- 1 out of 5 parents have left tweens home alone for an entire day.
- Over one-quarter of parents have *not* talked "a lot" with their tweens about neighborhood, Internet or home safety.
- Parents have more confidence in their tweens' ability to follow guidelines for gun and fire safety than for Internet or storm safety.

### Safety Talk with Tweens

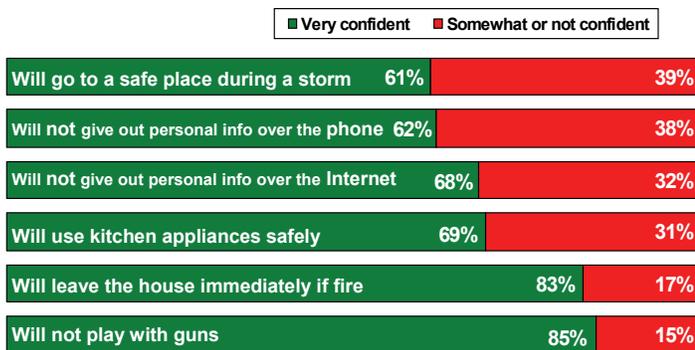
Children who are home alone need to understand a variety of safety issues. Parents were asked to indicate how much they have talked with their tweens about safety issues, reporting whether they have discussed safety issues "a lot", "somewhat" or "have not" discussed them. Our findings indicate that:

- ➔ 32% of parents *have not* or have *somewhat* discussed neighborhood safety
- ➔ 30% of parents *have not* or have *somewhat* discussed Internet safety
- ➔ 28% of parents *have not* or have *somewhat* discussed home safety

## Confidence in Following Safety Guidelines

Parents were asked to rate how confident they were that their children would follow safety guidelines if left home alone. Most parents were “very confident” that their tweens would not play with guns and would exit the house immediately if there were a fire. In comparison, parents were less confident that tweens would go to a safe place during a storm and that they would *not* give out personal information over the phone or Internet (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Parents' Confidence That Their 11 to 13 Year Old Will Follow Safety Guidelines If Home Alone



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, April, 2008

## Confidence in Tweens Home Alone

Parents who are more confident in their tweens' safety skills are generally more likely to leave them home alone. However, even among the group of parents who DO leave their tweens alone, many are NOT particularly confident about safety guidelines:

- ➔ 30% of parents whose tweens stay home alone lack confidence that their children would not give out personal info over the phone
- ➔ 28% of parents whose tweens stay home alone lack confidence that their children would not give out personal info over the Internet
- ➔ 25% of parents whose tweens stay home alone are not fully confident their children will use a stove, oven, or microwave safely
- ➔ 11% of parents whose tweens stay home alone are not fully confident their children will not play with guns

## Implications

There is no magic age at which it is safe to leave a child home alone. During the summer months, millions of parents face decisions about whether to leave their tweens home alone. Decisions can be especially challenging, because some summer camps may limit children in this age group; other parents simply cannot afford to send their tweens to summer activities for all the hours that they work.

In this poll, we found that nearly two-thirds of all tweens are left home for at least an hour or two. Surprisingly, we also found that for several common safety guidelines, many parents did not feel fully confident that their tweens would follow essential safety guidelines if left home alone.

Before leaving children alone, parents should practice safety plans with their children and review and discuss common safety questions and situations. Some resources to help parents with their decision to leave a child home alone include:

### Is your child ready to stay home alone?

<http://www.childcareaware.org/en/subscriptions/dailyparent/volume.php?id=9>

### Storm safety:

<http://www.ready.gov/america/beinformed/thunderstorms.html>

### Internet safety:

<http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/internet.htm>

**Fire Safety:** <http://www.nfpa.org/>

### Gun Safety:

[www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/guns.htm](http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/guns.htm)

### 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 from April 11-29 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults aged 18 and older (n=2,064) with and without children 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 53% among panel members contacted to participate.

Child Health Evaluation and Research Unit



**C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health**  
**Director:** Matthew M. Davis, MD, MAPP  
**Associate Director:** Sarah J. Clark, MPH  
**Manager & Editor:** Dianne C. Singer, MPH  
**Data Analyst:** Amy Butchart, MPH  
**Contact us!** Email: NPCH@med.umich.edu  
[www.med.umich.edu/mott/research/chearnpoch.html](http://www.med.umich.edu/mott/research/chearnpoch.html)

This Report includes research findings from the C.S. Mott Children's National Poll on Children's Health, which do not represent the opinions of the investigators or the opinions of the University of Michigan. The University of Michigan reserves all rights over this material.