



Volume 27
Issue 2
July 11, 2016

C.S. Mott Children's Hospital

National Poll on Children's Health



Tweens Safe Alone? Parents Less Sure about Guns than Emergencies

When school gets out for the summer, parents must make arrangements for supervision of their children. This can be particularly difficult for “tweens” – children 9-12 years old – who may view themselves as too old for a babysitter, but who may be too immature to stay home unsupervised.

In May 2016, the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of children 9-12 years old about their expectations for summer supervision of their tweens.

Report Highlights

4 of 5 parents are very confident that their tween will know what to do in a storm or fire if home alone.

Only about half of parents are confident that their tween will not play with guns if home alone.

Mothers and fathers have similar levels of confidence in tweens' safety practices.

Parent Views about Leaving Tweens Home Alone

Only 43% of parents say they are comfortable leaving their tween home alone for an hour or more. Staying home alone is a routine occurrence for 13% of tweens overall: 9% of younger tweens (9-10 years) and 19% of older tweens (11-12 years) stay home alone for at least two hours every week.

Parents report that summer plans for tweens include 24% staying home alone or with siblings, and another 11% staying with a babysitter or adult relative; 23% will attend summer school or other organized activities, while 42% will stay home with a parent.

Parents have varying levels of confidence in whether their tween will be able to handle situations that might arise when parents are not home. Most parents are very confident that their tween will go to a safe place if there is a tornado or severe thunderstorm (82%) and will immediately leave the home in the event of a fire (78%). Fewer parents are very confident that tweens will recognize when they need to make a call to 9-1-1 (64%). Only 53% of parents are very confident that their tweens will not play with a gun while the parent is not home. Mothers and fathers give similar confidence ratings; parents are more confident with older vs. younger tweens, but they do not have different levels of confidence for tween sons vs. daughters.

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.

Parents' confidence that their 9-12 year old will follow safety practices if home alone



Source: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2016

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 May 2016 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults age 18 and older (n=2,100) selected from GfK's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. For this report, responses from parents with at least one child age 9-12 (n = 560) were used. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 60% among parents contacted to participate. The margin of error is ± 2 to 5 percentage points.

Implications

The question of what age children can begin to stay home unsupervised, and for how long, is a vexing one for parents, particularly as children move into the tween years. Parents take into account many factors, including the maturity of the child, the age of siblings, neighborhood safety, and the proximity of friends or relatives. There is no single “right age” that indicates children are ready to stay home unsupervised. This poll shows that 13% of tweens stay home alone for at least two hours every week; tweens’ time home without a parent likely increases in the summertime, when children are out of school.

As parents make decisions about leaving their tween home unsupervised, they often consider whether the child is responsible and knowledgeable enough to make good decisions for the situations that might arise. Many parents explain and provide examples of safety practices, such as finding a safe place to wait out a storm, or knowing what to do in the event of a fire. Many schools teach about safety, either through direct lessons or as part of fire or storm drills. This national poll suggests that most parents are confident that tweens have learned these lessons and will know what to do if faced with a storm or fire while home alone. Parents have less confidence about whether tweens will be able to distinguish when a situation is serious enough to warrant a call to 9-1-1; parents likely recognize that this type of situational decision-making is more difficult for children to learn.

Parents express a great deal of hesitancy about gun safety during times when their tween is unsupervised: nearly half are not confident that their tween will not play with a gun discovered while the parent is not present. This relatively low level of confidence was similar among fathers and mothers, among lower- and higher-income parents, and for tween boys and girls – suggesting that parental concerns about gun safety are not confined to any particular demographic group. The level of confidence is a substantial decrease to the confidence expressed in our [2008 NPCH Report](#) about tween safety in the summertime. The change in parent attitudes may reflect growing awareness of the dangers of unsecured guns for children. Media reports of accidental deaths among children who find guns – at their own home or at the home of a friend, relative, or babysitter – may strike a chord among parents that a gun accident can happen to any child, anywhere.

With an estimated 3 in 10 US households having at least one gun, it is not unlikely that unsupervised tweens will encounter a gun in their own home or while visiting friends or relatives. A broad array of organizations, from the American Academy of Pediatrics to the National Rifle Association, call for the secure storage of guns and ammunition where children cannot reach it. Many experts also suggest that parents – regardless of whether they own a gun themselves – talk about gun safety with their children. The key question for parents is to decide if their tweens have the maturity to overcome their curiosity when finding a gun, so they will leave the gun untouched.

Co-Director: Sarah J. Clark, MPH
Co-Director: Gary L. Freed, MD, MPH
Manager & Editor: Dianne C. Singer, MPH
Data Analyst: Amilcar Matos-Moreno, MPH
Web Editor: Anna Daly Kauffman, BA
Research Associate: Sara L. Schultz, BA
Website: MottNPCH.org



**Child Health Evaluation
and Research Unit**
University of Michigan

Facebook | Twitter | Google+ |

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