



National Poll on Children's Health

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Report Highlights

Adults rate childhood obesity, bullying and drug abuse at the top of the list of big health problems for kids across the U.S.

Internet safety rises to the 4th biggest child health concern, up from 8th in 2014.

Sexting rises to #6 on the list of biggest health concerns, up from 13th in 2014.

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.

Top 10 Child Health Problems: More Concern for Sexting, Internet Safety

In this year's ninth annual survey of top health concerns conducted by the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, adults rate childhood obesity, bullying, and drug abuse as the top health concerns for kids across the U.S.

These three concerns were the same top-ranked child health problems as in 2014. But this year, Internet safety was the 4th most commonly identified "big problem", up from #8 in 2014. Sexting received the biggest change in rating this year, from #13 in 2014 to #6 in 2015 (Figure 1).

Smoking has consistently been rated at or near the top of the list of health problems for kids from the perspective of adults (not just parents). However, in 2015 concern about smoking and tobacco use dropped from #4 in 2014 to #7 in 2015.

Figure 1. Top 10 U.S. Children's Health Concerns Rated as a "BIG PROBLEM" by Adults in 2015

2015		2014
1	Childhood Obesity • 60%	1
2	Bullying • 58%	2
3	Drug Abuse • 53%	3
4	Internet Safety • 51%	8
5	Child Abuse & Neglect • 49%	6
6	Sexting • 45%	13
7	Smoking and Tobacco Use • 45%	4
8	School Violence • 45%	5
9	Teen Pregnancy • 42%	10
10	Stress • 41%	11

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 2015 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults age 18 and older (n=1,982) 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 60% among the panel members contacted to participate. The margin of error is ± 3 to 4 percentage points.

Other child health concerns rated as a “big problem” in 2015 for children and teens across the U.S. include: unsafe neighborhoods (40%), alcohol abuse (39%), sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS (38%), depression (38%), suicide (37%), hunger (34%), not enough opportunities for physical activity (31%), gun-related injuries (30%), motor vehicle accidents (30%), attention deficit disorder (26%), autism (24%), safety of medications (17%) safety of vaccines (15%) infant mortality (13%) and food allergies (13%).

Although hunger and infant mortality were perceived less often as “big problems” than other health concerns for kids across the U.S., these opinions changed when respondents were presented with current statistics on hunger and infant mortality. After current information was presented about the number of children affected, hunger was rated as a “big problem” for children in the U.S. by 54% of respondents (up from 34%), and infant mortality was rated as a “big problem” by 23% of adults (up from 13%).

Differences in Perceptions of “Big Problems” by Race/Ethnicity

While groups of white, black and Hispanic adults all list childhood obesity and bullying among the top three child health issues, Hispanic adults list child abuse and neglect as the #3 health concern for kids across the U.S. ([Figure 2](#)). Black adults list depression #4, alcohol abuse #7 and hunger as #10 in the top 10 health concerns ([Figure 3](#)).

Implications

As the National Poll on Children's Health measures the views of adults in the U.S. about child health issues each year, different pictures emerge about the greatest concerns of communities. Challenges such as obesity, bullying, and drug abuse remain the top three “big problems” for children's health for the second year in a row. However, adults from different racial/ethnic groups see many other health problems facing children in their communities quite differently. This is a reminder that programs that use a “one-size-fits-all” approach may not be successful in addressing communities' child health concerns. Instead, taking differences in community perceptions into account can be a key to successful connections with communities and their concerns.

Another major finding is that Internet safety increased as a concern for children's health from 2014 to this year. The perception of Internet safety as a major concern, along with rising concerns about sexting for children's health, reflect growing public perception that youth access to the media environment in 2015 includes risks that worry many members of the public.

Moreover, we found this year that providing information about the number of children affected by specific health problems can change how the public perceives them. For the quite different problems of hunger and infant mortality, providing the latest available data led more respondents to rate them as a “big problem” than before they had seen the data. This suggests that levels of public concern may be affected by providing reliable information in a format that is easy to understand.

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