



## Can their 18-year-olds make a doctor's appointment? Half of parents say no

As teens get older, they shift from relying on their parents to being in charge of their own health care. With complex health care systems to navigate, parents naturally ask themselves: will my teen be ready to manage?

While parents are in an ideal position to judge whether their teens have the skills to manage their own health care, little is known about how parents view their teens' readiness for taking responsibility in this arena. Health care experts refer to the process of shifting from child-focused care to adult-focused care for a teen or young adult as "transition," which commonly occurs around age 18.

The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of parents of adolescents and young adults aged 13-30 years about their perceptions of their adolescents' / young adults' abilities to manage their health care needs.

### Teens and Their Health Care Self-Management Skills

Most parents (69%) believe adolescents should start seeing their adult-focused provider for primary care at age 18 (42%), or even at younger ages (27%). However, only about one-third (30%) of parents of 18- to 30-year-olds reported that their adolescents actually transferred to adult health care at age 18.

Explanations for delayed transitions to adult care may relate to parents' perceptions of their teens' lack of readiness to self-manage their care (Figure 1). While parents are largely confident in adolescents 16-17 years old and 18-19 years old taking medications correctly, far fewer parents are confident in their teens' abilities to manage several other aspects of their own care—such as knowing when to go to the emergency room or making an appointment—compared with parents of young adults 20-21 years old.

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### Report Highlights

**Two-thirds of parents believe teens should shift to adult-focused care by age 18; only one-third do so.**


**Less than one-half of parents of 18- to 19-year-olds believe their teens know how to make a doctor's appointment.**

**Parents are least confident about their teens' self-management related to knowing what their health insurance covers.**

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Figure 1. Parent's perception of their adolescent's/ young adult's ability to manage health care needs



	Age of Adolescent/Young Adult		
	16-17	18-19	20-21
Takes medications correctly	80%	85%	90%
Knows when to go to the ER	55%	70%	88%
Could fill out a medical history form, including medications	41%	54%	81%
Knows how to make doctor's appointment	22%	47%	79%
Knows what their insurance covers	16%	28%	62%

*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 June 2014 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults age 18 and older from GfK's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. Responses from parents with a child 13 to 30 (n=887) were used for this report. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 53% among the parent panel members contacted to participate. The margin of error is ± 5 to 9 percentage points and higher among subgroups.*

## **Implications**

The results of this poll offer a national view of the perceptions of parents of adolescents and young adults when it comes to taking care of their own health care as independent individuals. While most parents generally agree that 18 years old is a reasonable age to transfer care from child-focused to adult-focused providers, that is not happening in practice. Instead, fewer parents perceive that their 16- to 17-year-olds and 18- to 19-year-olds have health self-management skills than do parents of 20- to 21-year-olds, for several skills other than taking medications. This suggests that adolescents and young adult children of these parents have not assumed primary responsibility for their health care needs, in many respects.

The take-home message from this poll is that a person's age should not be the only factor, or even the major factor, in determining a person's readiness to transfer from child-focused care to adult-focused care. Rather, before they transition to an adult-focused health care system, adolescents may benefit from learning skills necessary to self-manage their health care needs. Their parents, and their health care providers, can promote adolescents' greater roles in their care before age 18, in ways that help teens prepare to self-manage their future health care needs. In addition, working on skills in mid-teen years may help parents judge their teens' readiness for independence when it comes to health and health care issues.

When it comes time to transition adolescents and young adults from child-focused to adult-centered care, there are no absolute rules. Recent guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that transition planning be tailored for each individual, and should include the development of skills necessary for a person to self-manage his own health care needs. The findings of this poll suggest that it may be helpful to start work on teens' skills of self-managing their health earlier rather than later in adolescence.

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