



## News Release

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**New study published in *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*:**

**Internet Filters Can Successfully Block Most Pornography While Allowing Health Information,  
Depending on How Schools and Libraries Configure Them**

But Blocking of Health Content Increases Sharply When Filters Are Set at Higher Levels,  
Kaiser Family Foundation Study Shows

Washington, D.C. – The Internet filters most frequently used by schools and libraries can effectively block pornography without significantly impeding access to online health information – but only if they aren’t set at their most restrictive levels, according to a comprehensive new study released today by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.

But as filters are set at higher levels, they block access to a substantial amount of health information, with only a minimal increase in blocked pornographic content.

“Filters can strike a good balance between protecting kids from pornography while still giving them access to online health information, but only if they’re configured carefully,” said Kaiser Family Foundation Vice President Vicky Rideout. “Otherwise, they can be a serious obstacle, especially on issues such as pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and birth control.”

Most filters allow schools and libraries to tailor blocking by setting specific configurations. The study, *See No Evil: How Internet Filters Affect the Search for Online Health Information*, tested the six most commonly used filters at the “least,” “intermediate,” and “most” restrictive settings. Under the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA), filters are currently required on all computers in schools receiving federal funds. The CIPA requirement for libraries was overturned by a federal circuit court last spring, and will be reviewed by the Supreme Court this session.

At the least restrictive level, the filters incorrectly block an average of just 1.4% of health sites. However, when set at the most restrictive level, filters block 24% of health sites. Blocking of sites on sexual health issues such as condoms and safe sex was higher at all levels: from 9% at the least restrictive setting to as much as 50% of all sites at the most restrictive setting. The amount of pornographic content blocked was found to increase only marginally, from 87% at the least restrictive configuration to 91% at the most restrictive level.

An earlier Kaiser study indicates that 70% of 15-17 year-olds have used the Internet to look up health information, including 40% who have researched sexual health issues such as birth control or sexually transmitted diseases (Kaiser Family Foundation, *Generation Rx.com*, 2001).

(more)

The “*See No Evil...*” study found that blocking of sites with information on breast cancer does not appear to be a significant problem for the filters studied. No such sites were blocked at the least restrictive level, 0.2% were blocked at the intermediate setting, and 6.9% were blocked at the most restrictive level. Sites with information on other topics were much more likely to be blocked, including nearly one in four sites on sexually transmitted diseases (23%), one in three on pregnancy (32%) or birth control (35%), and one in two on condoms (55%) or safe sex (50%), at the most restrictive settings.

The study also found that incidental exposure to pornography while searching for health information was highly infrequent. Across the 24 health-related searches conducted on six different search engines, just 1% of the results contained pornography.

“The Internet has the potential to revolutionize access to health care information and services,” said study co-author Dr. Caroline Richardson of the University of Michigan Medical School. “It’s important to ensure that filters don’t interfere with that potential.”

The results of the study will be discussed at a briefing at 1:00 PM EST at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., hosted by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, with comments from the American Library Association, Enough is Enough, Responsible Netizen, Planned Parenthood, and the N2H2 filter company. **All information conveyed at the briefing will be embargoed for release until 4 PM EST on Tuesday, December 10, 2002. A webcast of the briefing will be available at [www.kaisernetwork.org](http://www.kaisernetwork.org) at 4 PM EST.**

The study was conducted for the Foundation by Dr. Richardson and Dr. Paul Resnick at the University of Michigan School of Information. Results are being published in the December 11, 2002 issue of *The Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA). Researchers conducted online searches of 24 health topics (such as breast cancer, diabetes, and birth control) and six pornographic terms across six different search engines. The more than 3,000 health and 500 pornography sites that came up during these searches were then systematically tested against the six filters most widely used in schools and libraries: 8e6, CyberPatrol, N2H2, SmartFilter, Symantec, and Websense.

Each filtering product can be configured to block many different categories of content in addition to pornography, such as nudity, profanity, discrimination, or violence. Some filters also allow schools and libraries to specify exceptions for medical or sex education information, if they choose to. For this study, each filter was assessed at three levels: least restrictive (blocking only pornography), intermediate (blocking additional categories such as nudity and discrimination) and most restrictive (blocking many additional categories such as profanity, drugs, and alcohol). Calls to 20 school districts and libraries around the country indicated a wide range of configurations, with just one setting its filter at the least restrictive level.

**An executive summary (Pub #3294) is available online at [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org) or by calling the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation’s publication request line at 1-800-656-4533.**

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