

Missy Krasner (650) 854-9400

The Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard Health News Index is designed to help the news media and people in the health field gain a better understanding of which health stories in the news Americans are following and what they understand about those issues. Every two months, Kaiser/Harvard issues a new index report. This twentieth report is based on a survey of 1,033 American adults. The survey asked respondents about major health issues covered in the news between September 1 and October 7, 1999. For comparison purposes, respondents were also asked about other leading issues in the news during the same period.

Health News Stories Followed by the Public

The health news story followed most closely by Americans in September was the federal government's civil lawsuit against the tobacco industry to recover billions of tax dollars spent on smoking related health-care (followed very or fairly closely by 62% of the public).

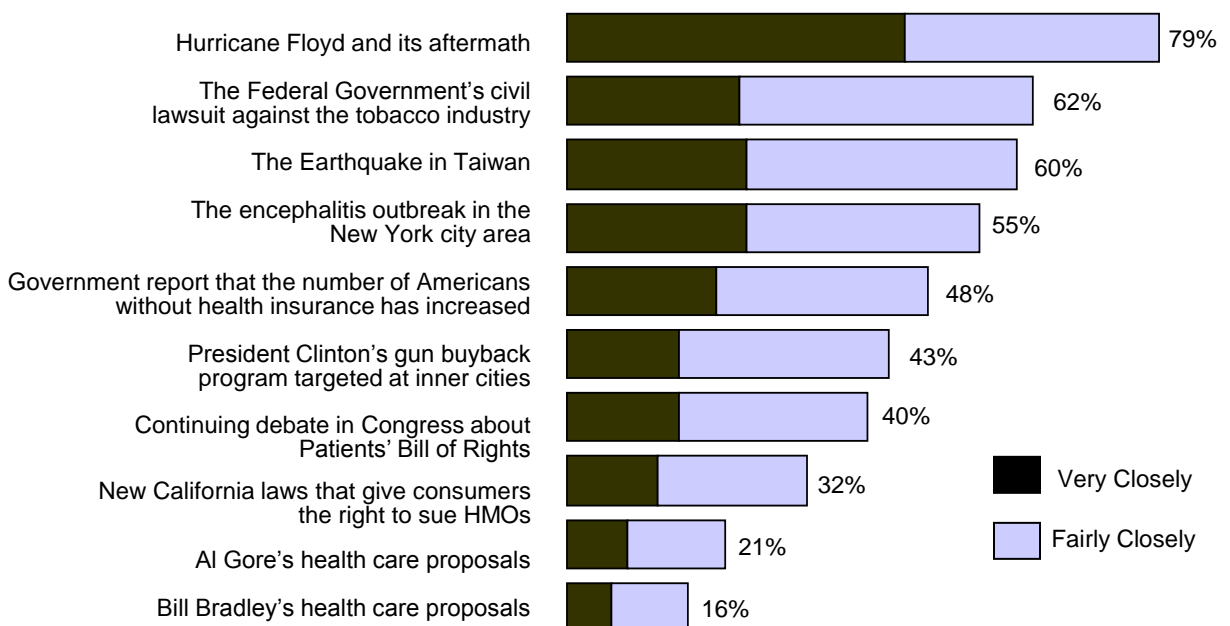
By comparison, 79% closely followed coverage of Hurricane Floyd and its aftermath. Three out of five Americans reported closely following the earthquake in Taiwan.

Among other health issues in the news, 55% closely followed news about the encephalitis outbreak in the New York city area. News coverage about a new government report that the number of Americans without health insurance has increased was followed by almost half (48%) of Americans. Four in ten Americans closely followed news of the continuing debate in Congress about patient protections in health care. Almost one-third (32%) followed news reports of new California laws that give consumers the right to sue HMOs.

Slightly more than one in five Americans (21%) closely followed Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore's health care proposals, while 16% followed Bill Bradley's health care proposals.

THE KAISER/HARVARD HEALTH NEWS INDEX

How closely Americans followed leading stories in the news from September 1 to October 7, 1999

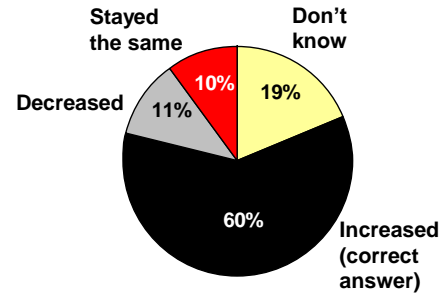


WHAT THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS ABOUT HEALTH STORIES IN THE NEWS

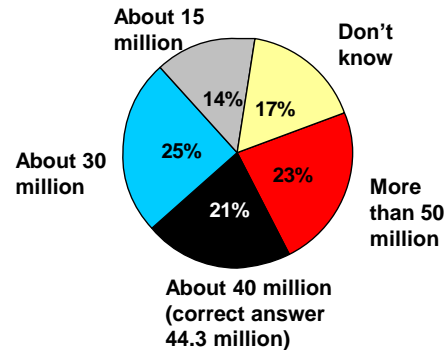
Health Insurance

Nearly half (48%) of all Americans closely followed news of the release of a government report about the increasing number of Americans who are without health insurance. Three-fifths knew that the report showed the number of Americans without health insurance has increased. Just under half (49%) knew that more uninsured Americans are employed or from families in which someone is employed; however, 41% incorrectly believed that more uninsured Americans are unemployed or from families in which no one is employed. Twenty-one percent knew that about 40 million Americans have no health insurance. About four in ten mistakenly thought the number was lower, 25% thought about 30 million were uninsured and 14% thought the number was closer to 15 million. About one-fourth (23%) thought the number was higher (greater than 50 million) and 17% said they did not know.

The number of Americans without health insurance has . . .



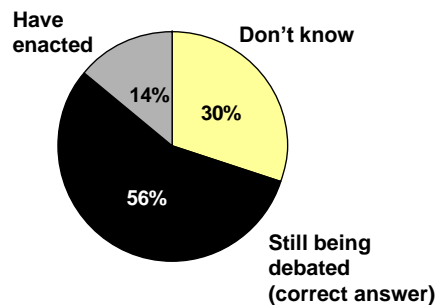
About how many Americans have no health insurance?



Protecting Patients in Health Plans

Four in ten Americans closely followed news reports of the continuing debate in Congress over patients' rights legislation. Over half of Americans (56%) were aware that proposed patient protection legislation was still being debated in Congress. Fourteen percent incorrectly thought a law had already been enacted and three out of ten people said they did not know the status of the legislation.

Has the Federal Government enacted a new law protecting patients in managed care and HMOs or is Congress still debating this law?



Almost a third of Americans (32%) closely followed reports of the new patient protection legislation in California. Thirty-eight percent correctly believed that the new laws would give consumers the right to sue HMOs. About one in ten (11%) believed this right was not included and just over half (51%) said they did not know.

Awareness of whether Democratic Presidential candidates made proposals about health care reform.

Health Care Reform Proposals by Democratic Presidential Candidates

When asked specifically about whether they had heard or seen Al Gore or Bill Bradley make any proposals about health care reform over the past month, slightly more than one in five Americans (21%) said Al Gore and 17% said Bill Bradley had made proposals.

