

The Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health's 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 since August of 1996, Kaiser/Harvard has issued a new index report. This report is based on a survey of 1,006 American adults. The survey asked respondents about major health issues covered in the news between January 1 and January 31, 2000. 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**

About two-thirds of Americans (67%) closely followed January news reports of a nation-wide flu outbreak and of new methods for diagnosing and treating the flu.

By comparison, nearly three in four Americans (74%) closely followed news of winter storms hitting the East

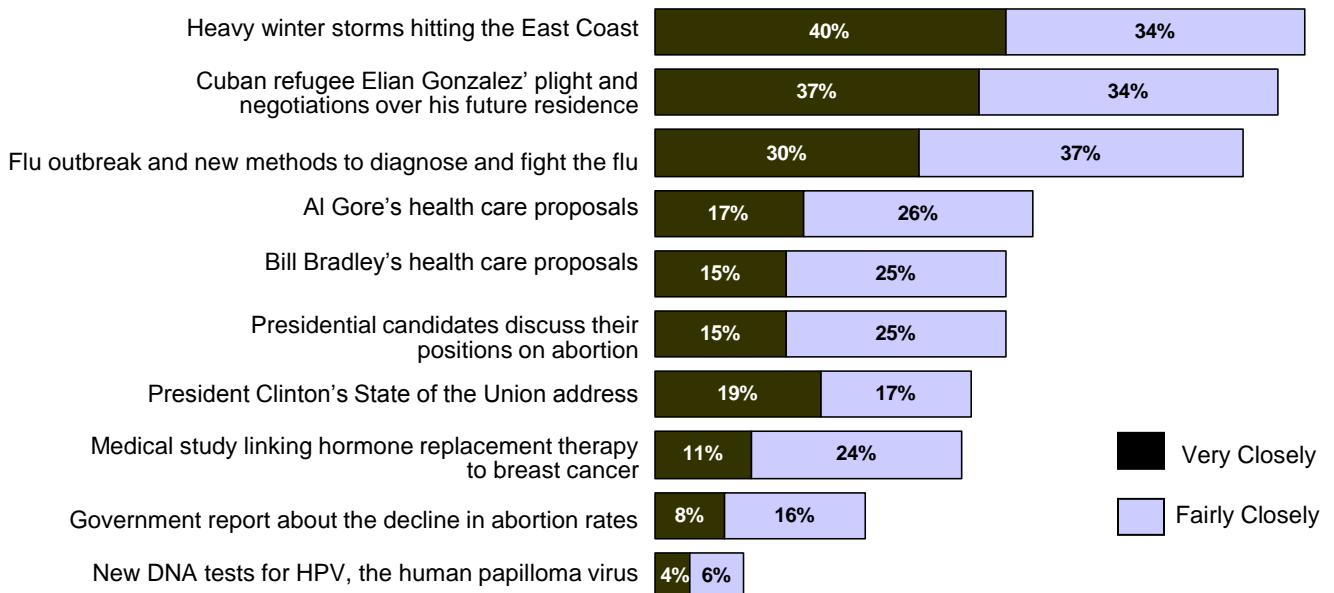
Coast. Seven in ten (71%) people closely followed news coverage about the plight of young Cuban refugee, Elian Gonzalez.

Among other health issues in the news, about four in ten Americans closely followed news of Democratic presidential candidates' proposals to provide health insurance to people currently uninsured (43% followed Al Gore's proposals, while 40% followed Bill Bradley's). A similar percentage (40%) closely followed news about Democratic and Republican presidential candidates discussing their stands on abortion. About one-third of Americans (36%) closely followed coverage of President Clinton's State of the Union address.

News coverage about a medical study that revealed a link between hormone replacement therapy and an increased risk of breast cancer in women was followed by 35% of Americans. Fewer followed closely news of a government report on the declining rate of abortion (24%), or news coverage of new DNA tests for HPV, the human papilloma virus (10%).

**KAISER/HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
HEALTH NEWS INDEX**

**How closely Americans followed leading stories in the news from January 1 to 31, 2000**

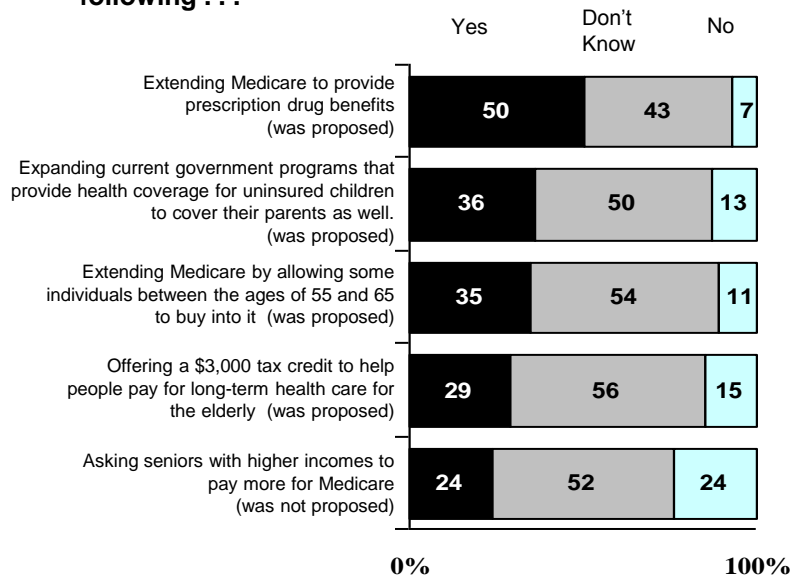


# WHAT THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS ABOUT HEALTH STORIES IN THE NEWS

## *The State of the Union Address:*

About one in three Americans (36%) closely followed news coverage of President Clinton's State of the Union address. Asked whether specific proposals were made by Clinton in his speech, many said they did not know. One-half of Americans (50%) knew that the President proposed extending Medicare to provide prescription drug benefits. Thirty-six percent knew Clinton proposed expanding CHIP to cover the parents of enrolled children. About one-third of Americans (35%) knew that the President proposed extending Medicare to those ages 55 to 65. About three in ten (29%) knew he had proposed a tax credit for providing long-term health care for the elderly. About one-fourth (24%) mistakenly thought that Clinton had proposed asking seniors with higher incomes to pay more for Medicare; while an equal percentage knew he had not made such a proposal.

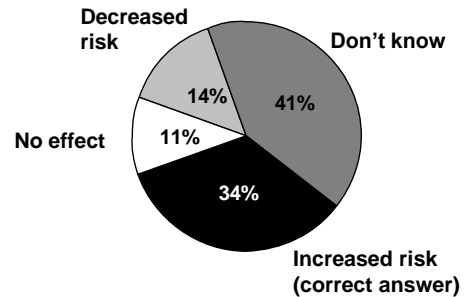
Please tell me whether or not the President--in his recent State of the Union address--proposed the following . . .



## *Hormone Replacement Therapy and Breast Cancer*

One-third of Americans (35%) closely followed news reports of a medical study by the National Cancer Institute that found a relationship between hormone replacement therapy and the risk of developing breast cancer. Nearly the same percentage (34%) knew the study reported that the risk of developing breast cancer was increased by taking the hormone replacement therapy. Fourteen percent mistakenly thought the drug therapy decreased the risk, 11% erroneously thought the study found no relationship, and 41% did not know.

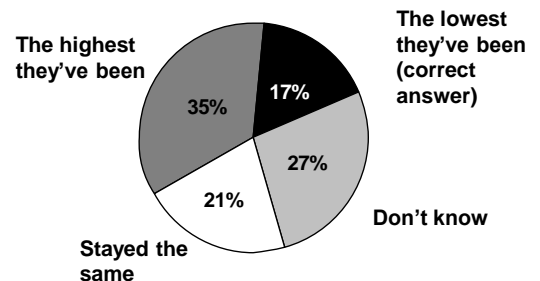
What effect does hormone replacement therapy have on the risk of developing breast cancer?



## *Decline in Abortion Rates*

While about one-quarter (24%) of Americans closely followed news stories of trends in the rates of abortions, only 17% correctly identified that abortion rates were the lowest they have been in over twenty years. Almost one-third (35%) thought they were the highest they have been in twenty years and about one-fifth (21%) thought the rate has stayed the same. Twenty-seven percent did not know.

Thinking about abortion rates over the past twenty years, are abortion rates in recent years . . .



The Health News Index is based on a national random sample survey of 1,006 Americans conducted February 4-8, 2000 to measure Americans' interest in and knowledge of health stories covered in the news media during the previous month. The survey was designed and analyzed jointly by the staff of the Kaiser Family Foundation and staff at the Harvard University School of Public Health under the direction of Professor Robert J. Blendon, Sc.D., and in consultation with the Pew Center for The People and The Press. The fieldwork was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates. The margin of error is +/- 3%. For additional copies of this report (# 3004), please call the Kaiser Family Foundation's Publications Request Line at 1-800-656-4533.