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Steve Rabin (650) 854-9400

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 1996, Kaiser/Harvard has issued a new index report. This report is based on a survey of 949 American adults. The survey asked respondents about major health issues covered in the news between August 22 and September 22, 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

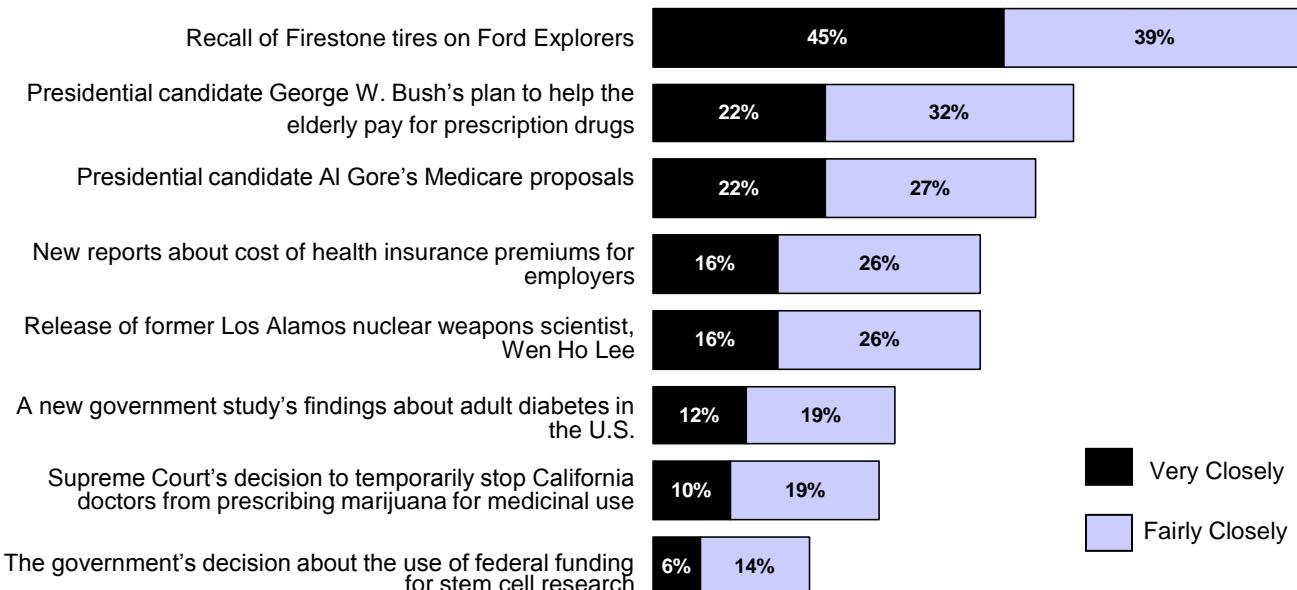
About half of Americans said they closely followed two health news stories during this period. Fifty-four percent (54%) said they closely followed news stories in September about presidential candidate George W. Bush's proposal to help the elderly pay for prescription drugs, and 49% said they closely followed coverage of presidential candidate Al Gore's Medicare proposal.

By comparison, 84% of Americans said they closely followed news of the recall of Firestone tires. About four in ten (42%) said they closely followed news of the release of former Los Alamos nuclear weapons scientist, Wen Ho Lee, who had been accused of spying.

Among other health issues in the news, about four in ten Americans (42%) said they closely followed coverage of studies of the rising cost of health insurance premiums that employers pay for their workers. About three in ten Americans (31%) said they closely followed news of a new government study's findings about adult diabetes in the U.S., and 29% said they closely followed news about the Supreme Court's decision to temporarily stop California doctors from prescribing marijuana for medicinal use. Only one in five (20%) said they closely followed news of the government decision to allow the use of federal funding for stem cell research.

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

How closely Americans followed leading stories in the news from August 22 to September 22, 2000



# WHAT THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS ABOUT HEALTH STORIES IN THE NEWS

## Presidential Candidates' Medicare and Prescription Drug Proposals

About half of Americans reported that they were closely following news stories about George W. Bush's (54%) and Al Gore's (49%) proposals to help the elderly pay for prescription drugs. But relatively few respondents seemed to grasp the essential difference between the Gore and Bush Medicare prescription drug proposals. In fact, about six in ten respondents indicated that they did not know how Bush (59%) or Gore (57%) planned to provide prescription drug coverage for seniors. When asked about George W. Bush's plan, about one in four (24%) correctly indicated that the Bush proposal relied primarily on private insurance plans to provide prescription drug coverage. Similarly, 27% knew that the Gore plan would expand Medicare to pay directly for part of the cost of prescription drugs.

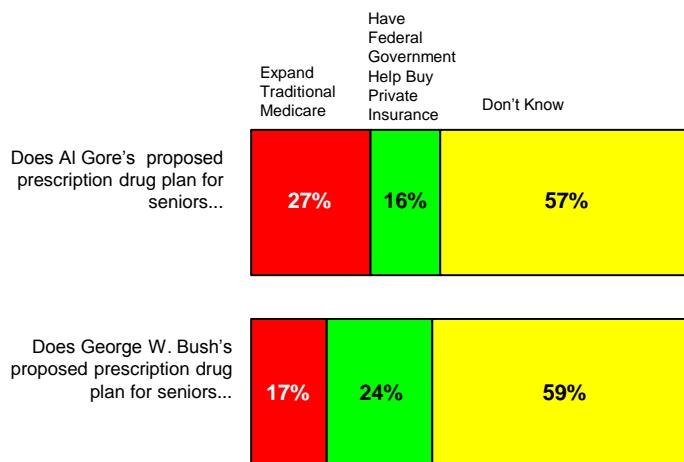
## Employers' Health Insurance Premiums

About four in ten Americans (42%) said they closely followed coverage of new reports about the cost of health insurance premiums that employers pay for their workers. Twenty-nine percent (29%) correctly said that the health insurance premiums employers pay for their workers have increased faster than they have in the previous years. A similar number (27%) incorrectly said that they have increased about the same as they have in previous years, and about one in ten (11%) mistakenly thought they had increased slower than in previous years. One in three (33%) said they did not know.

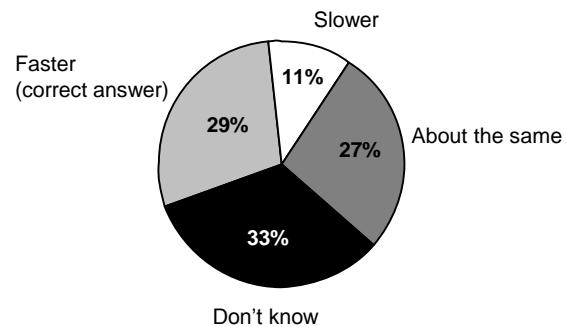
## Increase in Adult Diabetes

About three in ten Americans (31%) said they closely followed coverage of a new government finding about adult diabetes in the U.S. About one in four (42%) correctly said that the study found that the incidence of adult diabetes has increased. One in ten (10%) erroneously thought the rates had stayed the same, and 3% believed they had decreased. Forty five percent (45%) said they did not know.

## Presidential Candidates' Proposals to Provide Prescription Drugs to Seniors



Compared to previous years, health insurance premiums employers in the U.S. pay for their workers have increased...



The rate of adult diabetes in the U.S. has...

