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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 1082 American adults. The survey asked respondents about major health issues covered in the news between February 26 and March 26, 2001. 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**

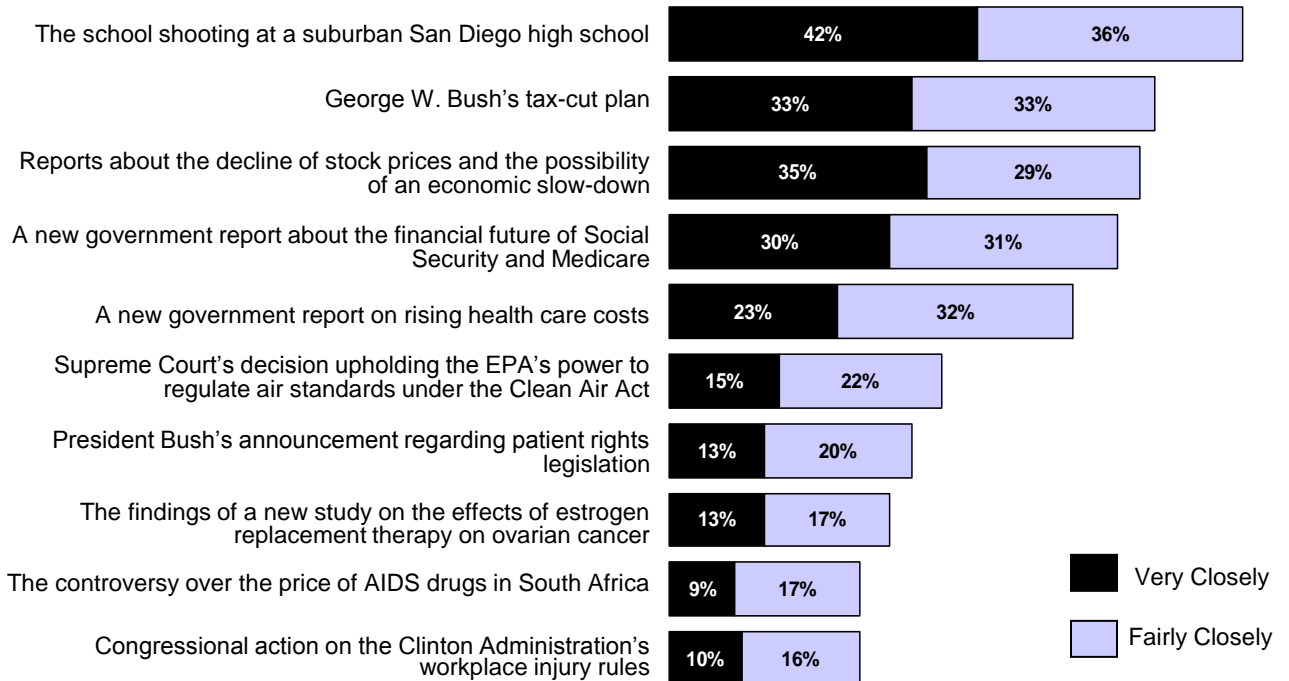
Two health news stories caught the public's attention during this period. Sixty-one percent said they closely followed news stories about a new government report on the financial future of Social Security and Medicare, and 55% said they closely followed stories about a new government report on rising health care costs.

By comparison, 78% of Americans said they closely followed news of the school shooting at a suburban San Diego high school. Two-thirds (66%) said they closely followed news of George W. Bush's tax-cut plan. A similar number (64%) said they closely followed reports about the decline of stock prices and the possibility of an economic slow-down.

Among other health issues in the news, one-third of Americans (33%) said they followed stories about President Bush's announcement regarding patient rights legislation now being considered by Congress. Three in ten (30%) Americans followed stories about the findings of a new study on the effects of estrogen replacement therapy on ovarian cancer. About one out of four (26%) Americans said they followed stories about the controversy over the price of AIDS drugs in South Africa, and 26% followed stories about Congressional action on the Clinton Administration's workplace injury rules.

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

How closely Americans followed leading stories in the news from February 26 to March 26, 2001

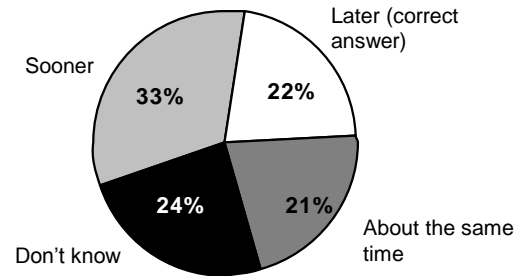


# WHAT THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS ABOUT HEALTH STORIES IN THE NEWS

## ***The Financial Future of Medicare and Social Security***

About six in ten Americans (61%) said they closely followed coverage of a new government report about the financial future of Medicare and Social Security. About one in five (22%) correctly said that the trust funds for these programs are expected to run out of money later than had been previously thought. Over half answered incorrectly and said that the funds for these programs are expected to run out of money sooner (33%) or at about the same time (21%) as previously thought. Twenty-four percent said they did not know.

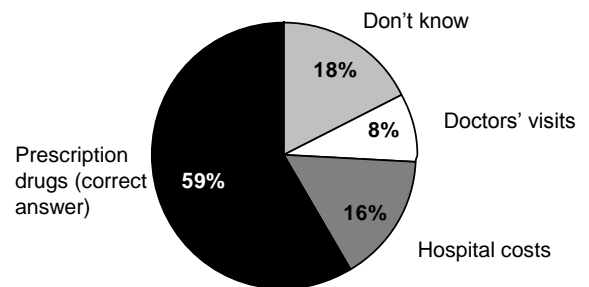
**Are the Medicare and Social Security trust funds expected to run out of money sooner, later, or at about the same time as previously thought?**



## ***Health Care Costs***

A little over half the public (55%) said they closely followed coverage of a new report on the cost of health care in the United States. A similar number (59%) were able to correctly identify prescription drug costs as the category of health care spending that grew the most in the last year. About one in four answered incorrectly and said that it was hospital costs (16%) or the cost of doctors' visits (8%). Eighteen percent said they did not know.

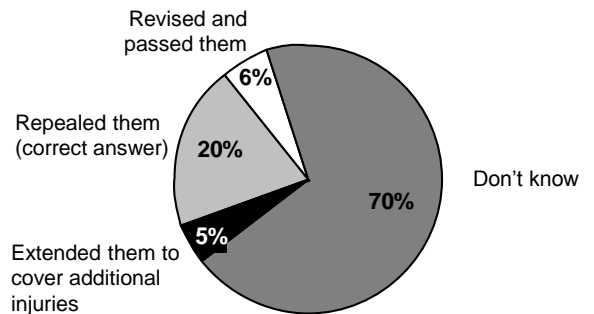
**Which category of health care costs grew most in the last year?**



## ***Workplace Injury Rules***

About a quarter (26%) of Americans reported that they closely followed news stories about Congressional action on the Clinton Administration's workplace injury rules aimed at preventing repetitive stress injuries. One in five (20%) correctly said the rules were repealed by Congress and will not go into effect. About one in ten answered incorrectly and said that the rules were extended to cover additional repetitive stress injuries (5%) or that the rules were revised and passed by the new Congress (6%). A large majority (70%) said they did not know.

**What action did Congress take on the workplace injury and ergonomics rules?**



## ***AIDS Drug Court Case in South Africa***

About a quarter (26%) of Americans said they closely followed news stories about the controversy over the price of AIDS drugs in South Africa. When asked specifically about the current court case involving the South African government and drug companies, only 15% correctly said that the major reason for the trial is that the drug companies are challenging a South African law that allows the country to import or produce cheaper AIDS drugs that are still under patent protection. About two-thirds (65%) said they did not know.