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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 news stories Americans are following and what they understand about issues covered in the news. Every two months since 1996, Kaiser/Harvard has issued a new index report. This report is based on a survey of 1,001 adults. The survey asked respondents about major health issues covered in the news between October 22 and November 22, 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

News stories about bioterrorism held the public's attention during this period. Stories about anthrax were followed closely by 83% of the public, while

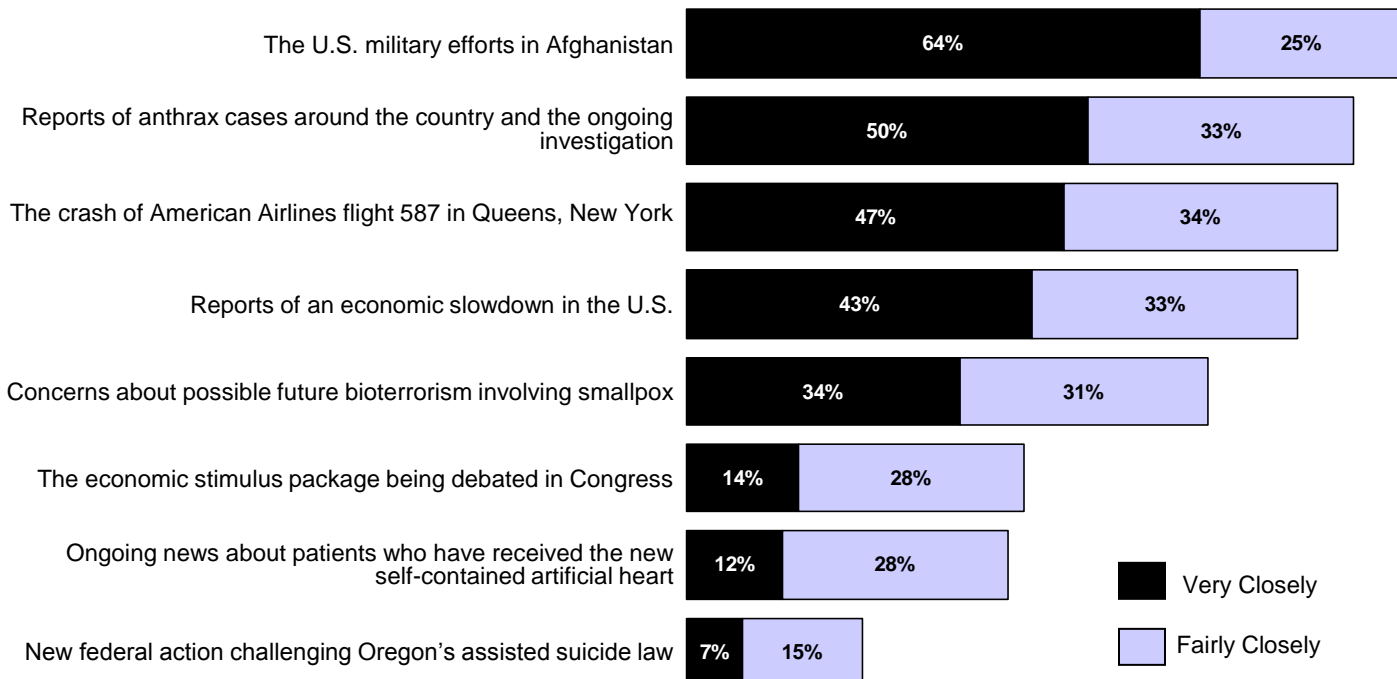
concern about possible future bioterrorism involving smallpox was followed by 65% of the public.

By comparison, 89% of the public said they closely followed reports of the U.S. military efforts in Afghanistan. Eighty-one percent said they closely followed news about the crash of American Airlines flight 587 in Queens, New York, and 76% said they followed reports of an economic slowdown in the U.S. Less than half (42%) closely followed the economic stimulus package being debated in Congress.

Among other health issues in the news, four in ten adults (40%) said they closely followed ongoing news coverage of patients who received the new self-contained artificial heart. Less than a quarter (22%) of the public closely followed reports of new federal action challenging Oregon's assisted suicide law.

KAISER/HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH HEALTH NEWS INDEX

How closely Americans followed leading stories in the news from October 22 to November 22, 2001

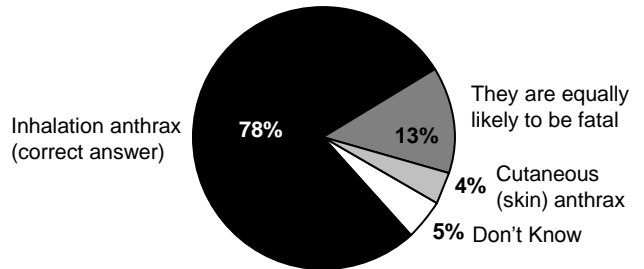


WHAT THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS ABOUT HEALTH STORIES IN THE NEWS

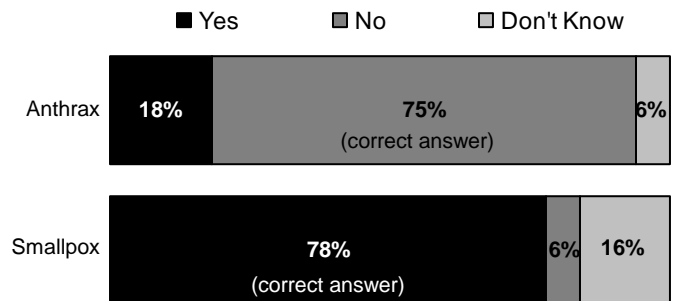
Anthrax cases and investigation

Most of the public reported closely following news of anthrax cases in the U.S. and the ongoing anthrax investigation, and a large majority were able to correctly answer several knowledge questions about the disease. Eighty-seven percent knew that a treatment exists for people who have been exposed to anthrax, and 78% knew that the inhalation form of the disease is more often fatal than the cutaneous (skin) form. Three-quarters (75%) of the public answered correctly that anthrax is a disease that is not contagious, while 18% erroneously thought that anthrax is a contagious disease. Eight in ten (80%) also knew that fewer than ten people have died from inhalation anthrax since the attacks began.

Which form of anthrax is more often fatal?



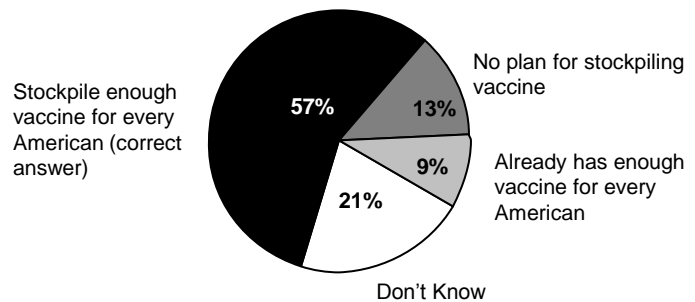
Is this disease contagious?



Smallpox

Nearly two-thirds of the public (65%) closely followed news regarding concerns about possible future bioterrorism involving smallpox. Seventy-eight percent were aware that smallpox is a contagious disease, while 6% incorrectly thought that smallpox is not contagious, and 16% didn't know enough to say. When asked about the U.S. government's plan regarding the smallpox threat, more than half (57%) knew that the government is planning to stockpile enough doses of smallpox vaccine for every American. Thirteen percent thought that the government has no plan in place for stockpiling vaccine, 9% said that the U.S. already has enough vaccine, and 21% said they did not know what the government's plans are.

What is the U.S. government planning to do regarding the smallpox threat?



Year 2001 Summary

The Top Three Most Closely Followed General Health Stories of 2001

1. Reports of anthrax cases around the country and the ongoing investigation (November; 83% followed closely)
2. Concerns about possible future bioterrorism involving smallpox (November; 65% followed closely)
3. The implant of the first self-contained artificial heart (July; 53% followed closely)

The Top Three Most Closely Followed Health Policy Stories of 2001

1. President Bush's proposal to immediately help seniors with their prescription drug costs (July; 63% followed closely)
2. A new government report about the financial future of Social Security and Medicare (March; 61% followed closely)
3. The continuing debate in Congress over the Patients' Bill of Rights (July; 58% followed closely)

The *Health News Index* is based on a national random sample survey of 1,001 adults conducted November 29 – December 2, 2001 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 by Dr. Mollyann Brodie and Elizabeth Hamel of the Kaiser Family Foundation and Dr. Robert J. Blendon and John M. Benson at the Harvard University School of Public Health, 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 sampling error is +/- 3.2%. For additional copies of this report (#3211), please call the Kaiser Family Foundation's Publications Request Line at 1-800-656-4533, or visit our website at www.kff.org.