

Jennifer Webber (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 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 1,201 adults. The survey asked respondents about major health issues covered in the news between April 26, 2002 and May 27, 2002. 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

Among health news stories, over half of the public (52%) closely followed discussions in Congress about a Medicare prescription drug benefit. Half (51%) also reported closely following stories

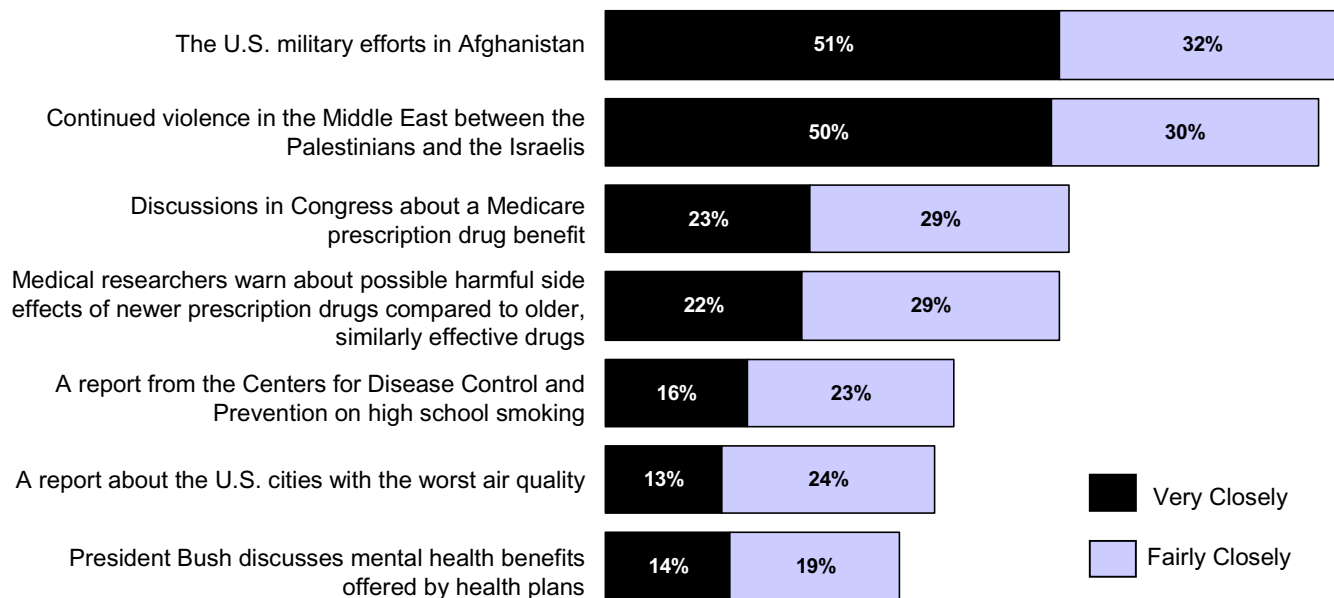
about warnings from medical researchers on possible harmful side effects of newer prescription drugs compared to older, similarly effective drugs.

By comparison, eighty-three percent of the public continued to closely follow stories about the U.S. military efforts in Afghanistan (also 83% in March/April 2002). Eight in ten Americans (80%) reported closely following the continued violence in the Middle East between Palestinians and Israelis, up slightly from 76% in March/April 2002.

Among other health issues in the news, four in ten Americans (39%) said they closely followed news coverage about the report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on high school smoking. Thirty-seven percent of adults reported closely following stories about air quality in major U.S. cities. One third said they closely followed news stories on President Bush's comments about mental health benefits offered by health plans.

KAISER/HARVARD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH HEALTH NEWS INDEX

How closely Americans followed leading stories in the news from April 26, 2002 to May 27, 2002



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 The Kaiser Family Foundation
 Mollyann Brodie, Ph.D.
 Vice President & Director of Public Opinion & Media Research
 2400 Sand Hill Road, Menlo Park, California 94025
 650/854-9400 Fax 650/854-4800
 www.kff.org

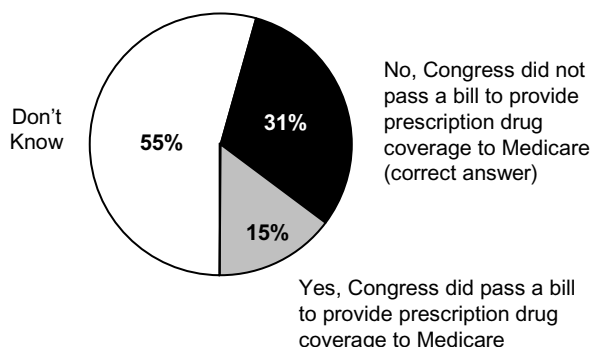
Harvard School of Public Health
 Robert J. Blendon, Sc.D.
 Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis
 677 Huntington Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts 02115
 617/432-4502 Fax 617/432-0092
 www.hsph.harvard.edu

WHAT THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS ABOUT HEALTH STORIES IN THE NEWS

Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit

Over half of the public (52%) reported closely following ongoing discussions in Congress about a Medicare prescription drug benefit. For all age groups, a significantly smaller percentage (31%) knew that Congress had not passed a bill to provide prescription drug coverage to Medicare. Four in ten adults ages 50 and over correctly answered the question, while fewer younger Americans answered correctly, (27% for adults ages 30 to 49 and 21% of adults ages 18 to 29). About seven in ten adults either mistakenly thought a bill had passed (15%) or said they did not know (55%).

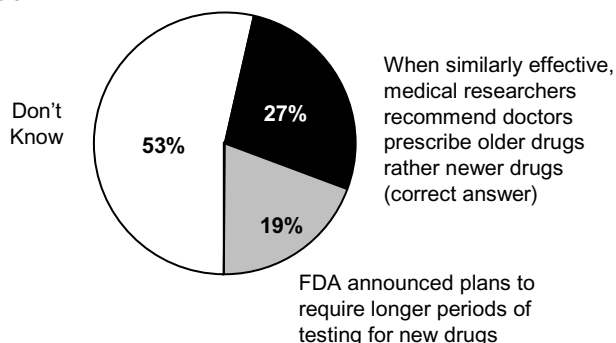
Did Congress recently pass a bill to provide prescription drug coverage to people on Medicare or not?



Possible Harmful Side Effects of Newer Prescription Drugs

Fifty-one percent of Americans said they closely followed news stories about a recent report warning about possible harmful side effects of newer prescription drugs. Many fewer (27%) knew that the report was about medical researchers advising doctors to avoid prescribing newer drugs when older, similarly effective drugs are available. One in five adults (19%) erroneously thought the report was about plans to require longer periods of prescription drug testing to reduce the chances of harmful side effects, and over half of the public (53%) said they did not know the content of the report.

Thinking about what you have heard or seen in the news about a recent report on the possible harmful side effects from newer drugs, what was the report about?



CDC Report on High School Smoking

About four in ten (39%) adults said they closely followed the news coverage of a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on high school smoking. Three in ten adults (29%) knew the report found that rates of high school smoking declined for the first time in 10 years. About one third (34%) mistakenly thought that smoking rates were up among teens. Six percent of Americans incorrectly thought the report indicated that kids living in urban areas were less likely to smoke than those in rural areas. About three in ten (32%) said they did not know what the findings from the CDC report were.

Which of the following statements best summarizes the findings of the recent report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on smoking among high school kids?

