

Poll on America's Top Health Concerns and Emergency Preparedness from Trust for America's Health

A SIGNIFICANT MAJORITY OF AMERICANS SUPPORT A HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF FEDERAL FUNDS FOR RESEARCHING CAUSES AND PREVENTING DISEASES.

THE PUBLIC FEELS THE COUNTRY IS NOT WELL PREPARED TO RESPOND TO TERRORIST ATTACKS AND LARGE-SCALE HEALTH EMERGENCIES.

PEOPLE ARE MORE CONCERNED WITH DISEASES THAT IMPACT THEIR DAILY LIVES THAN WITH POTENTIAL DISASTERS.

The following are key findings from a survey conducted in January 2005 by Public Opinion Strategies on behalf of Trust for America's Health.

A Large Majority of Americans Think a Higher Percentage of Federal Funds Should Go To "Researching Causes and Preventing Diseases"

In 2003, the federal government spent 92 percent of its health dollars on diagnosis and treatment of disease, and 8 percent of its health dollars on researching causes and preventing disease.

- Over 70 percent of Americans support increasing the share of federal dollars going to health prevention rather than health care.
- This support is strong across party lines with 66 percent of Republicans, 70 percent of Independents, and 75 percent of Democrats favoring it.

Cancer and Chronic Diseases are Americans' Top Health Concerns

- Americans (37 percent) rank cancer as their top individual health concern.
- Following cancer, the other top health concerns were heart disease (14 percent), obesity (13 percent), chemical terrorism (11 percent), and biological terrorism (7 percent).
- Combined, significantly more Americans were worried about chronic diseases (cancer, heart disease, obesity, and asthma), than various terrorist attacks (biological, chemical, and food contamination).



America's Top Health Concerns	
Top Tier Concerns	
Cancer	72%
Heart Disease	60%
Chemical Terrorism	50%
Second Tier Concerns	
Obesity	47%
Biological Terrorism	45%
Food Contamination	42%
Third Tier Concerns	
Vaccine Shortages	39%
Asthma	32%
Nationwide Flu Epidemic	32%

Note: Percent responding "most" or "a great deal."

Under 20% of Americans Feel the U.S. Public Health System is Very Prepared for Emergencies

■ Fewer than 20 percent of Americans believe the U.S. public health system is "very prepared" to handle any of a range of large-scale health emergencies. One quarter (25 percent) believe the U.S. is "very unprepared" to respond to these emergencies.

■ Overall, however, Americans feel that the country is less prepared to respond to a bioterrorism or chemical terrorism threat than a natural or accidental disaster, such as a tsunami or chemical spill.

▲ Seventy percent of respondents feel the U.S. public health system is prepared to handle a nationwide flu outbreak;

▲ Sixty-four percent of respondents felt the U.S. is prepared to respond to an accidental chemical spill, like the recent South Carolina train incident;

▲ A slight majority of Americans (56 percent) believe the U.S. is prepared to handle a natural disaster similar to the recent Asian tsunami.

■ On the other hand, only slightly more than half of Americans feel the U.S. is prepared to respond to a bioterrorism or chemical event (52 percent), and nearly half feel the U.S. is unprepared (46 percent). More Americans believe we are unprepared rather than prepared for a terrorist attack on the nation's food supply (49 percent and 47 percent respectively).

■ Across the board, women and African Americans were more concerned about health risks than men. Of particular note were concerns about cancer (all 72 percent; women 75 percent; men 68 percent; African Americans 84), asthma (all 32; women 39; men 25; African Americans 53), and obesity (all 47; women 52; men 42; African Americans 55).

Preparedness of the U.S. Public Health System: Very Prepared vs. Very Unprepared (Ranked by Net Difference)			
Scenario	Very Prepared	Very Unprepared	Net Difference
Nationwide flu epidemic	18%	11%	+7
Gas leak similar to the recent train derailment in the south	16%	12%	+4
Natural disaster like the tsunami in South East Asia	19%	24%	-5
Biological or chemical terrorist attack	10%	23%	-13
Terrorist attack on the food supply	9%	25%	-16

■ By an average of eight to 10 percentage points, women were more likely than men to feel that the country was unprepared for a disaster or terrorism attack.

Methodology

Public Opinion Strategies conducted a national survey of 800 registered voters on behalf of Trust for America's Health January 25-27, 2005. The margin of error is +/- 3.5%.