

IN NEW POLL, AMERICANS RATE THE FLU EPIDEMIC, CANCER AND OBESITY AS TOP HEALTH CONCERNS

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WASHINGTON, January 29, 2004 – A new poll released today by the American Cancer Society and Trust for America's Health (TFAH) found that Americans ranked the flu epidemic, cancer and obesity as their leading health concerns.

The poll also revealed that more than three in four Americans say the government needs to spend more on health priorities and a majority of respondents felt that public health spending was vital to improving homeland security.

“This poll shows that while bioterrorism, SARS, and Mad Cow disease may top the media headlines, people are exponentially more concerned with health matters that impact the daily lives of their families and communities,” said Dr. Shelley A. Hearne, Executive Director of TFAH. “The sad news is right now America's public health system is being stretched beyond its breaking point trying to protect our communities from the full spectrum of health threats we face.”

“A common thread ties the health issues that concern Americans the most and that is the need for a strong federal investment in the public's health and safety,” said Gary J. Streit, chair, national board of directors of the American Cancer Society. “Americans are counting on the government to spend more to protect us against major diseases and emerging health threats. Even in a time of rising deficits and limited resources, we cannot allow the threads binding the nation's public health system to unravel.”

Also today, a coalition of more than 370 organizations called for a 12 percent increase in the public health budget to better protect the health, safety and security of the nation. In a joint letter to the President and Members of Congress, the coalition warned that the nation's already overextended public health system would not be able to respond adequately to ongoing and potential health threats, including infectious and food-borne illnesses, chronic disease epidemics or biological or chemical terrorism, without additional resources.

Key Findings of the Health Priorities Poll

- The flu epidemic was rated as 2003's top health concern, with 35 percent of respondents believing that the flu epidemic is the single greatest potential health threat featured in recent news stories. It topped the list compared to anthrax or other biological or chemical terrorism concerns at 19 percent, West Nile virus at 15 percent, “Mad Cow” disease at 13 percent and SARS at 9 percent. Ten percent

more women than men think that the flu is biggest concern, 40 percent compared to 30 percent.

- Cancer and obesity were viewed as the biggest health risks facing people in their communities. Twenty-five percent of respondents rated cancer as their highest concern, 21 percent ranked obesity the highest. Heart disease was ranked highest by 17 percent, diabetes by 15 percent, lack of necessary vaccines such as flu shots by 7 percent, Alzheimer's by 5 percent, and anthrax or other bioterrorism by only 4 percent.
- Even young Americans must worry about their weight. Adults under the age of 35 are twice as likely (23%-12%) to say obesity is the biggest single health risk not heart disease, while adults 35 or older are equally concerned about heart disease (19%) and obesity (19%). However, adults of every age say cancer is the biggest health risk facing people in their community.
- Over 78 percent of Americans responded that they want the government to spend more to protect the nation's health against major disease and emerging bio-threats.
- Most Americans, 56 percent, say that there is a clear relationship between increased spending on emerging health threats such as bioterrorism and improving our homeland security system, and believe that increasing spending on emerging health threats is key to improving homeland security. Another 37 percent say that increased spending on emerging health threats may be important but is not connected to homeland security. The poll found bi-partisan agreement on this point. Fifty-four percent of Republicans surveyed and 58 percent of Democrats felt that increasing spending on health risks will improve our national system of homeland security.
- Nearly 50 percent of respondents felt the nation was only "somewhat prepared" to handle major health threats, with 12 percent saying that the nation is "not at all prepared." Seven percent feel the nation is "extremely well prepared." A higher percentage of Republicans, 67 percent, compared to Democrats, 51 percent, and Independents, 54 percent, think the country is prepared to handle major health threats.
- Eighty-six percent of the American public wants the federal government to increase spending on biomedical research. A 53 percent majority say they would like to see an increase of up to 10 percent above the current level of spending, with another 33 percent who would increase spending even more than 10 percent.

The poll was conducted by Penn, Schoen and Berland Associates on behalf of the American Cancer Society and TFAH. It consisted of 911 telephone interviews nationwide among adults 18 years or older, with an overall margin of error at +/- 3.3 percent and a 95 percent confidence level.

The American Cancer Society is dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem by saving lives, diminishing suffering and preventing cancer through research, education, advocacy and service. Founded in 1913 and with national headquarters in Atlanta, the Society has 14 regional Divisions and local offices in 3,400 communities, involving millions of volunteers across the United States. For more information anytime, call toll free 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit www.cancer.org.

Trust for America's Health is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority. More information is available at www.healthyamericans.org.