

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 those issues. Every two months since 1996, Kaiser/Harvard has issued a new index report. This report is based on a survey of 1,001 American adults. The survey asked respondents about major health issues covered in the news between August 25 and September 25, 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**

In the wake of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, virtually all other news was put on hold. More people (95%) reported closely following this story than any other in the history of the *Health News Index*. By comparison, 65% of the public

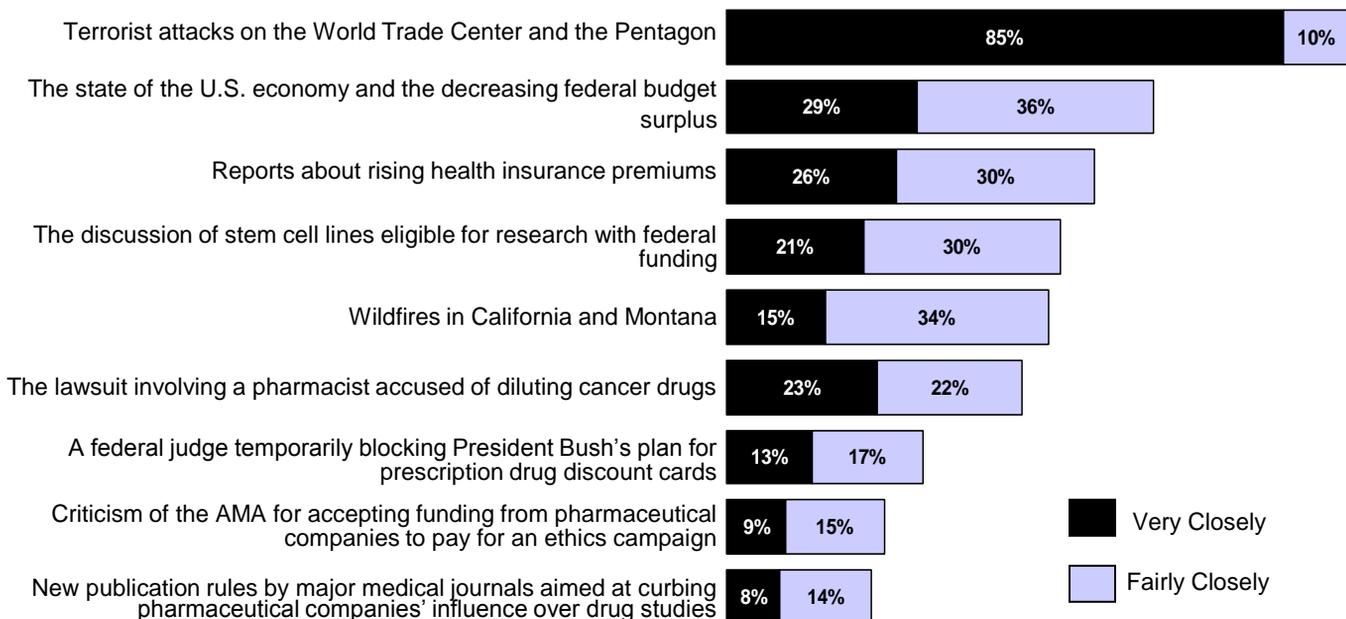
said they closely followed news about the state of the U.S. economy and the decreasing federal budget surplus, and nearly half (49%) closely followed news of the wildfires in California and Montana.

Almost all of the health stories were reported before September 11<sup>th</sup>. Reports about rising health insurance premiums garnered substantial attention, as 56% of Americans reported following this story. Half (51%) of the public also reported following discussions over which stem cell lines would be eligible for federal funding.

Among the other health stories, 45% of the public said they followed coverage of a lawsuit involving a pharmacist accused of diluting cancer drugs. Three in ten Americans (30%) followed news of a temporary court order blocking President Bush's prescription drug discount card plan, while less than a quarter followed criticisms of the American Medical Association (AMA) for accepting funds from pharmaceutical companies for an ethics campaign (24%), and new publication rules adopted by major medical journals (22%).

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

How closely Americans followed leading stories in the news from August 25 to September 25, 2001

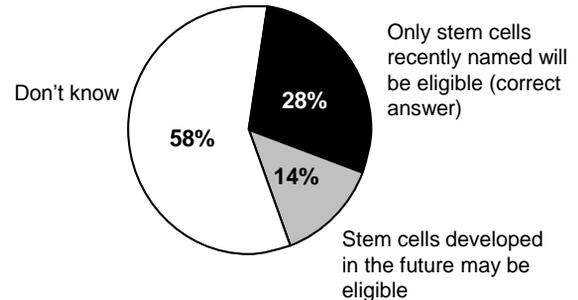


# WHAT THE PUBLIC UNDERSTANDS ABOUT HEALTH STORIES IN THE NEWS

## Stem Cell Research

Half of Americans (51%) reported that they closely followed news coverage of the discussion over which stem cell lines would be eligible for research with federal funding. When asked if, under President Bush's current policy, stem cell lines developed in the future could be eligible, 28% answered correctly, saying no, that only those stem cell lines recently named by the National Institutes of Health would be eligible. Nearly one in six Americans (14%) incorrectly thought that stem cell lines developed in the future could be eligible if they met certain criteria and about six in ten (58%) said they did not know if future stem cell lines would be eligible for federal funding or not.

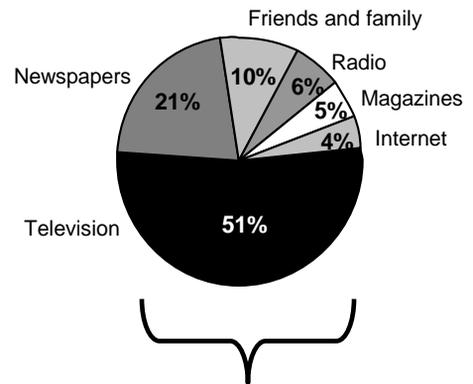
**Under President Bush's current policy, will stem cell lines developed in the future be eligible for federal funding for research if they meet certain criteria, or will only those named recently by the NIH be eligible for federal funding?**



## SOURCES OF HEALTH NEWS AND INFORMATION

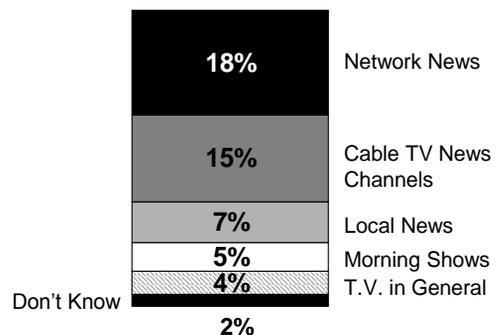
Half (51%) of the public report that television is their most important source of news and information about health issues. One in five (21%) says newspapers are their most important source, while smaller minorities identify talking with friends and family (10%), the radio (6%), magazines (5%), or the Internet (4%).

**What is your MOST important source of news and information about health issues?**



People over age 50 are more likely than those under age 30 to report that newspapers are their most important source of news and information about health issues (24% vs. 15%). Those under age 30 are more likely than their older counterparts to depend on radio (10% vs. 4%) or the Internet (7% vs. 1%).

The 51% of the public who reports that television is their major source of health news consists of people who cite news shows on major broadcast networks, such as ABC, CBS, NBC or PBS (18%), cable TV channels such as CNN, MSNBC, or Fox News Channel (15%), local television news (7%), morning shows like *Today* or *Good Morning America* (5%), or television in general (4%). Women are more likely than men to cite news shows on major broadcast TV networks (21% vs. 16%) while men are more likely than women to cite cable TV channels (18% vs. 13%).



The *Health News Index* is based on a national random sample survey of 1,001 adults conducted September 28 – October 1, 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 Lindsay Heberling 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 error is +/- 3.3%. For additional copies of this report (#3189), please call the Kaiser Family Foundation's Publications Request Line at 1-800-656-4533, or visit our website at [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org).