

Couch-potato kids are biggest child health problem in the US, adults say

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Adults across the U.S. rate not getting enough exercise as the top health concern for children in 2012, according to a new University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health.

In the poll's annual top 10 list, a nationwide sample of adults were asked to identify the top 10 biggest [health concerns](#) for kids in their communities. For the first time, not enough exercise was rated by most adults at the top of the list (39 percent). That was followed closely by [childhood obesity](#) (38 percent) and smoking and tobacco use (34 percent).

"Childhood obesity remains a top concern, and adults know it is certainly linked to lack of exercise," says Matthew M. Davis M.D., M.A.P.P., director of the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital [National Poll](#) on Children's Health.

"The strong [perception](#) that lack of exercise is a threat to children's health may reflect effective recent public health messages from programs such as First Lady [Michelle Obama](#)'s 'Let's Move' campaign.

"But lack of exercise offers many more benefits other than [weight loss](#) or preventing obesity – such as better attention and learning in school and improved sense of well-being," says Davis, associate professor of pediatrics and internal medicine at the U-M Medical School and associate professor of public policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy.

The rest of the poll results were:

- 4. Drug abuse (33 percent)
- 5. Bullying (29 percent)
- 6. Stress (27 percent)
- 7. Alcohol abuse (23 percent)
- 8. Teen pregnancy (23 percent)
- 9. Internet safety (22 percent)
- 10. Child abuse and neglect (20 percent)

"The strong connection of many of the top 10 child health concerns to health behaviors among children and adolescents underscores the importance of public programs and communication initiatives — for example, those designed to prevent drug abuse, tobacco use, alcohol abuse and teen pregnancy," Davis says.

The poll's results varied based on race/ethnicity. Hispanic adults were more likely to rate childhood obesity first (44 percent), followed by not enough exercise (38 percent), and also rated drug abuse higher than smoking and tobacco use.

Black adults had higher levels of concern about smoking and [tobacco use](#), ranking that most often (43 percent). They also had high levels of concern about racial inequality, ranking it seventh on the list, and gun-related injuries, ranking that ninth.

Black and Hispanic adults both identified sexually transmitted infections as a greater concern for kids in their communities than did white [adults](#).

"Child health varies across communities, and these results emphasize a need for local programs that respect and address community-specific health priorities for youth," Davis says.

Provided by University of Michigan Health System

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