

# Child health concerns vary among different races, ethnicities

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Adults across the U.S. rate childhood obesity as the top health concern for children in 2013, but priorities vary based on racial and ethnic backgrounds, 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. Overall, [childhood obesity](#) is rated at the top of the list (38 percent of adults said obesity is a 'big problem' for children in their communities). This is followed by drug abuse at 34 percent and smoking and tobacco use (32 percent).

The top three health issues are the same for whites, who made up the majority of the 1,996 respondents who were nationally representative. Hispanics also rated childhood obesity at number one (47 percent) but rank bullying number two at 43 percent and drug abuse third at 39 percent.

Among blacks, the differences are more striking. This group ranks childhood obesity sixth. Smoking and tobacco use is first, (40 percent), followed by drug abuse (34 percent) and [school violence](#) (33 percent). Sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, came in fourth and [teen pregnancy](#) fifth.

"Childhood obesity remains a top concern, but it is essential to look at differences in perception based on race and ethnicity," 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. "Medical and public health providers should be aware that different communities could have different priorities about what health problems are most important."

The strong link of many of the top 10 child health concerns to [health behaviors](#) of children and their families indicates that the public understands the powerful role of behavior in health – in terms of short-term impact and long-term consequences, 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.

1. Childhood obesity
2. Drug abuse
3. Smoking and [tobacco use](#)
4. Bullying
5. Stress
6. Alcohol abuse
7. Child abuse and neglect
8. Teen pregnancy
9. Internet safety
10. Depression

"Messaging from medical professionals, through public health programs and in the popular media about the risks of childhood obesity is widespread. Recent data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicate that rates of obesity in early childhood may be decreasing for the first time in some states, which may be attributable to the high level of concern and responses from parents, families and communities," says Davis.

"Still, we know obesity among children remains substantially higher than

it was in generations past. So this poll presents good news that much of the public recognizes the need to keep working hard on this problem." Davis says he hopes the results of this poll shine a light on how different communities prioritize the threats to children's health in their own communities.

"Not all groups see through the same lens. The differences we see based on race and ethnicity likely reflect street-level realities. To be successful, programs will likely need to respect and address community-specific health priorities for improving and safeguarding child health," he says.

**More information:** Full report: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health [mottnpch.org/sites/default/files/081913Top10.pdf](https://mottnpch.org/sites/default/files/081913Top10.pdf)

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