

Medical research needs kids, but two-thirds of parents unaware of opportunities

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To improve healthcare for children, medical research that involves kids is a must. Yet, only five percent of parents say their children have ever participated in any type of medical research, according to a new University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health.

However, in this month's poll, nearly one-half of parents said they are willing to have their children take part in research that involved testing a new medicine or a new vaccine, if their child had the disease being studied. More than three-quarters of parents are willing to have their children participate in research involving questions about mental health eating or nutrition.

The poll surveyed 1,420 parents with a child aged 0 to 17 years old, from across the United States.

According to the poll, parents who are aware of medical research opportunities are more likely to have their children take part. But awareness is an issue: more than two-thirds of those polled indicated that they have never seen or heard about opportunities for children to participate in medical research.

"Children have a better chance of living healthier lives because of vaccinations, new medications and new diagnostic tests. But we wouldn't have those tools without medical research," says Matthew M. Davis, M.D., M.A.P.P., director of the National Poll on Children's Health and professor of pediatrics and internal medicine in the University of Michigan Health System..

"With this poll, we wanted to understand parents' willingness to allow their children to participate in medical research. The good news is that willingness is far higher than the current level of actual engagement in research. This means there is great opportunity for the medical research community to reach out to families and encourage

them to take part in improving medical care."

In the poll, the willingness to have children take part differed by the type of study—higher for studies involving questions related to nutrition and mental illness; lower for studies involving exposure to a new medicine or vaccine.

The poll found that 43 percent of parents were willing to have their children participate in a study testing a new vaccine and 49 percent testing a new medicine. But 79 percent said they would allow their children to participate in studies on mental [health](#), and 85 percent in studies involving eating or nutrition.

The National Poll on Children's Health has been measuring levels of participation by children in medical research since 2007. The proportion of families whose children have taken part in research has not changed over this time period – from 4 percent in 2007, to 5 percent in 2011, to 5 percent in this latest poll.

"Five percent of families with children participating may not be enough to support important research efforts that the public has identified in previous polls – things like cures and treatments for childhood cancer, diabetes and assessing the safety of medications and vaccines," says Davis, who also is professor of public policy at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy.

"But the results indicate that a much bigger percentage of the public does understand the importance of [medical research](#) to advancing healthcare for children."

Researchers often struggle to get enough people to participate in studies that can make a real difference in healthcare discoveries, particularly when it comes to research for children.

"This poll shows that the research community

needs to step up and find ways to better reach parents about opportunities for [children](#) to participate, answer [parents'](#) questions about benefits and risks of participation, and potentially broaden the types of studies available," Davis says.

More information: C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health mottnpch.org/reports-surveys/m...-aware-opportunities

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