

**Working Papers
Project on the Public and Biological Security
Harvard School of Public Health**

14.

MAD COW DISEASE

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**Most Americans Not Concerned About Getting Mad Cow Disease
But One in Six Report They Stopped Ordering Beef
at Fast Food Restaurants
One in Four Believe There Have Been Human Cases
of Mad Cow Disease in the U.S.**

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BOSTON, MA — A new national study conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health *Project on the Public and Biological Security* finds that most Americans are not concerned about getting Mad Cow Disease. Less than one in four (18%) are concerned that they or someone in their immediate family will be infected by the disease. Less than one in 10 (9%) think they or a family member is likely to become infected by Mad Cow Disease in the next 12 months. This compares with 70 percent who think they or a family member is likely to get the flu.

However, one in six Americans (16%) say that they or someone in their family has stopped ordering beef at fast food restaurants because of reports about Mad Cow Disease. Similarly, 14% say they or a family member has stopped buying beef at the grocery store. Among those who are concerned that they or a family member will become infected with the disease, four in 10 report having stopped ordering beef at fast food restaurants (41%) and stopped buying beef at the grocery store (40%).

“If people became more concerned about the threat of Mad Cow Disease, it could have a substantial impact on the beef industry, even though the disease might only affect a small number of people,” said Robert J. Blendon, professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at the Harvard School of Public Health.

One in four Americans (27%) mistakenly believe that Mad Cow Disease has been found in humans in the U.S. Only a single case of Mad Cow Disease has been reported in cattle, and no humans have been found to have contracted the disease in the U.S.

These findings are based on interviews conducted January 7-11, 2004, with 1,015 adults nationwide.

Four in 10 Americans Do Not Have Confidence in the Meat Inspection System

Four in ten Americans (41%) say that they have only some (26%) or very little (15%) confidence in the current meat inspection system in the U.S. to protect Americans from becoming infected by Mad Cow Disease. Among those who are concerned that they or a family member might becoming infected with the disease, six in ten (60%) do not have confidence in the inspection system.

There is no public consensus on who should be mainly responsible in the future for preventing the spread of Mad Cow Disease in the U.S. Nearly the same proportions thought that producers of the food cattle eat (33%), the federal government (31%), and the American beef industry (29%) should be mainly responsible for preventing spread of the disease.

No Public Consensus on Blame for Flu Vaccine Shortages

In another recent study by the Harvard School of Public Health *Project on the Public and Biological Security*, two-thirds (66%) of Americans believe that the U.S. has been experiencing shortages of flu vaccine. However, there is no public consensus on who is to blame for the shortages. About one in four blame vaccine manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies (27%) and people getting vaccinated who are not at high risk of serious complications from the flu (24%). One in five (19%) blame government, either federal government public health agencies (15%) or state and local governments (4%).

When asked who should make sure that the U.S. has enough flu vaccine in the future, a majority (52%) believed government should be mainly responsible, either federal government public health agencies (33%) or state and local governments (19%). About one in four (23%) thought vaccine manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies should be mainly responsible.

“If another serious outbreak occurs, there will be public pressure to have someone accountable for having an adequate supply of flu vaccine,” said Professor Blendon.

Although most of the public believes that there have been shortages of flu vaccine, nearly half (45%) of Americans think that the media have overestimated the seriousness of the vaccine shortage problem.

(For a more extensive discussion of public response to this season’s flu outbreak, go to <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/press/releases/press12232003.html>.)

(For information about the flu, go to the CDC website, <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>.)

Methodology

These are the fourteenth and fifteenth in a series of studies by the Harvard School of Public Health *Project on the Public and Biological Security*. The project was funded through the federally-supported Center for Public Health Preparedness at HSPH.

The studies was designed and analyzed by researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health. The project director is Robert J. Blendon of the Harvard School of Public Health. The research team also includes John M. Benson, Catherine M. DesRoches, Kathleen Weldon, Elizabeth Raleigh, Stephen Pelletier, and Kalahn Taylor-Clark of the Harvard School of Public Health and Melissa J. Herrmann of ICR/International Communications

Research. The surveys were conducted via telephone for the Project by ICR/International Communications Research of Media (PA) between January 7 and January 11, 2004 (Mad Cow Disease) and between December 17 and December 21, 2003 (the flu), with nationally representative sample of 1,015 and 1,046 adults age 18 and over, respectively. The margin of error for both surveys is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Americans' Response to Reports about Mad Cow Disease

% who say they or someone in their family has...

Stopped ordering beef at fast food restaurants



Stopped buying beef at the grocery store



Stopped ordering beef at other restaurants



Stopped eating hamburger or ground beef



Stopped eating beef completely



Started buying and eating only organic or grassfed beef



Sources: Harvard School of Public Health/ICR poll (January, 2004)

Americans' Views on Who Should be Mainly Responsible for Preventing the Spread of Mad Cow Disease in the U.S.

Producers of the food that cattle eat



The federal government



The American beef industry



Don't know



Sources: Harvard School of Public Health/ICR poll (January, 2004)

Whom Do Americans Blame for Shortage of Flu Vaccine

Vaccine manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies



27%

People getting vaccinated who are not at high risk of serious complications from flu



24%

Government (Total)



19%

Federal government public health agencies



15%

State/local government



4%

Health plans and health insurance companies



9%

Doctor's organizations



4%

Sources: Harvard School of Public Health/ICR poll (December, 2003)

**Harvard School of Public Health
Project on the Public and Biological Security**

MAD COW SURVEY

**January 7-11, 2004
N=1015 adults nationwide**

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Madcowqn.doc

I N T E R N A T I O N A L C O M M U N I C A T I O N S R E S E A R C H

MAD COW SURVEY

Harvard School of Public Health, *Project on the Public and Biological Security*

The Mad Cow Survey was conducted by telephone from January 7 – January 11, 2004 among a nationally representative sample of 1,015 adults age 18 and older. All fieldwork by ICR/International Communications Research of Media, PA. Margin of error, plus or minus 3 percentage points.

MC-1. How closely have you been following news reports about Mad Cow Disease in the U.S.? Would you say you have been following them very closely, somewhat closely, not too closely, or not at all?

	CLOSELY			NOT CLOSELY			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	Not at all		
1/11/04	67	22	45	33	21	11	1	--

(Asked of one-half of total respondents; n = 508)

MC-2. I'm going to read you a list of things and ask you how likely it is that each of them will happen to you or someone in your immediate family during the next 12 months. (First/How about) (INSERT ITEM)? Do you think that is very likely to happen to you or someone in your immediate family, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not at all likely?

a. Contracting SARS, a respiratory disease from Asia

	LIKELY			NOT LIKELY			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not very	Not at all		
1/11/04	7	4	4	90	33	57	3	--

b. Getting the flu

	LIKELY			NOT LIKELY			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not very	Not at all		
1/11/04	70	28	42	29	19	10	1	*

c. Becoming infected with Mad Cow Disease

	LIKELY			NOT LIKELY			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not very	Not at all		
1/11/04	9	4	5	90	35	55	1	*

(Asked of one-half of total respondents; n = 507)

MC-3. Are you concerned that you or someone in your immediate family may become infected with Mad Cow Disease during the next 12 months?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
1/11/04	18	81	1	*

MC-3a. How concerned are you? Are you very concerned, somewhat concerned, or not very concerned?

MC-3/3a. Combo Table

	Concerned that you/someone in your immediate family may become infected with Mad Cow disease				Not concerned that you/someone in your immediate family may become infected with Mad Cow disease	Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Somewhat	Not very			
1/11/04	18	8	8	1	81	1	*

MC-4. In response to reports about Mad Cow Disease in the U.S., have you or has someone in your family done any of the following? Have you (INSERT)?

	Yes	No	I don't eat beef/meat anyway/I'm a vegetarian	Don't know	Refused
a1. Stopped ordering beef at other restaurants	13	79	7	1	*
b. Stopped buying beef at the grocery store	14	79	7	*	--
c. Started buying and eating only organic or grass-fed beef	4	88	7	1	*
d. Stopped eating hamburger or ground beef	13	80	7	*	--
e. Stopped eating beef completely	7	86	7	--	--

MC-4a-e. Changed Beef Buying/Eating Table

	Yes, changed beef buying/eating	No, did not change beef buying/eating	I don't eat beef/meat anyway/I'm a vegetarian
1/11/04	22	72	7

MC-5. Which ONE of the following do you think should be mainly responsible for preventing the spread of Mad Cow Disease in the U.S.?

	The federal government	Producers of the food that cattle eat	The American beef industry	Don't know	Refused
1/11/04	31	33	29	7	*

(Asked of total who think the federal government should be responsible for preventing the spread of Mad Cow Disease in the U.S.; n = 337)

MC-6. Which ONE of the following federal agencies do you think should be mainly responsible for preventing the spread of Mad Cow Disease in the U.S.?

	The USDA, or U.S. Department of Agriculture	The CDC, or Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	The FDA, or Food and Drug Administration	Don't know	Refused
1/11/04	51	10	33	6	*

MC-5/MC-6. Combo Table

	1/11/04
The federal government should be responsible for preventing the spread of Mad Cow Disease in the U.S.	31
The USDA should be mainly responsible	16
The CDC should be mainly responsible	3
The FDA should be mainly responsible	10
Producers of food that cattle should be responsible for preventing the spread of Mad Cow Disease in the U.S.	33
The American beef industry should be responsible for preventing the spread of Mad Cow Disease in the U.S.	29
Don't know	7
Refused	*

MC-7. In the U.S., to the best of your knowledge, has Mad Cow Disease been found only in cattle, only in people, or in both cattle and people?

	Only in cattle	Only in people	Both cattle and people	Don't know	Refused
1/11/04	66	1	26	7	--

MC-8. How much confidence do you have in the meat inspection system in the U.S. to protect Americans from becoming infected by Mad Cow Disease? A great deal of confidence, a good amount, only some, or very little?

	A great deal/good amount			Some/very little			Don't know	Refused
	NET	A great deal	A good amount	NET	Only some	Very little		
1/11/04	57	19	37	42	26	15	2	--