

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

8.
READINESS

Robert J. Blendon, Harvard School of Public Health, Project Director
John M. Benson, *Harvard School of Public Health*
Catherine M. DesRoches, Harvard School of Public Health
Melissa J. Herrmann, ICR/International Communications Research
Elizabeth Mackie, Harvard School of Public Health
Kalahn Taylor-Clark, Harvard School of Public Health
Kathleen J. Weldon, Harvard School of Public Health

April 17, 2003

Survey Shows Few Americans Making Preparations In Case of a Terrorist Attack Despite Department of Homeland Security Warnings and Recommendations

For Immediate Release: Thursday April 17, 2003

BOSTON, MA – A new study by the Harvard School of Public Health Project on the Public and Biological Security finds that although most Americans (73%) knew that the nation was on a high level of alert (orange) against a terrorist attack few developed evacuation plans or made arrangements for ‘sheltering in place’ as recommended by government officials.

Approximately one in four (28%) Americans said they had given some thought to making an evacuation plan for themselves and their family. However, only 12 percent actually made a plan. Very few Americans reported practicing their evacuation plan (4%). One of the reasons for this lack of planning may be that Americans are not sure what government officials mean when they talk about the need for evacuation plans. Fifty-five percent of Americans said they thought they knew what government officials meant when they talked about the need for Americans to have an evacuation plan in the event of a terrorist attack. When asked what they thought an evacuation plan included, 42% said a plan for getting to a community shelter, and 35% said an evacuation plan included a plan for getting out of their community. Both are recommended by the Department of Homeland Security.

Only 37% of the public reported having a windowless room in their home where they could shelter in place. While most Americans (75%) had duct tape that could be used to shelter in place, only a third (32%) reported having plastic sheeting and only 28% had both. Again, this lack of preparation could be due to confusion on the part of the public. Only one quarter of Americans (24%) report that they had heard the term “shelter in place” and knew what it meant.

“The public is confused about what they should do when government officials talk about evacuation plans and sheltering in place,” said Robert J. Blendon, professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis at the Harvard School of Public Health. “Government officials need to focus more on telling Americans what they should do in an emergency and spend less time talking about duct tape and extra batteries.”

The majority of Americans had many of the items that the government recommends buying as a precaution against a terrorist attack. The most commonly possessed items were: a working flashlight (94%), adequate supplies of food and water for three days (84%), extra batteries (82%), duct tape (75%), a working battery operated radio (75%), and a first aid kit (73%). They did not report buying these items because of the heightened terror alert. In fact, only 3% of Americans said they bought duct tape or plastic sheeting after the heightened terror alerts.

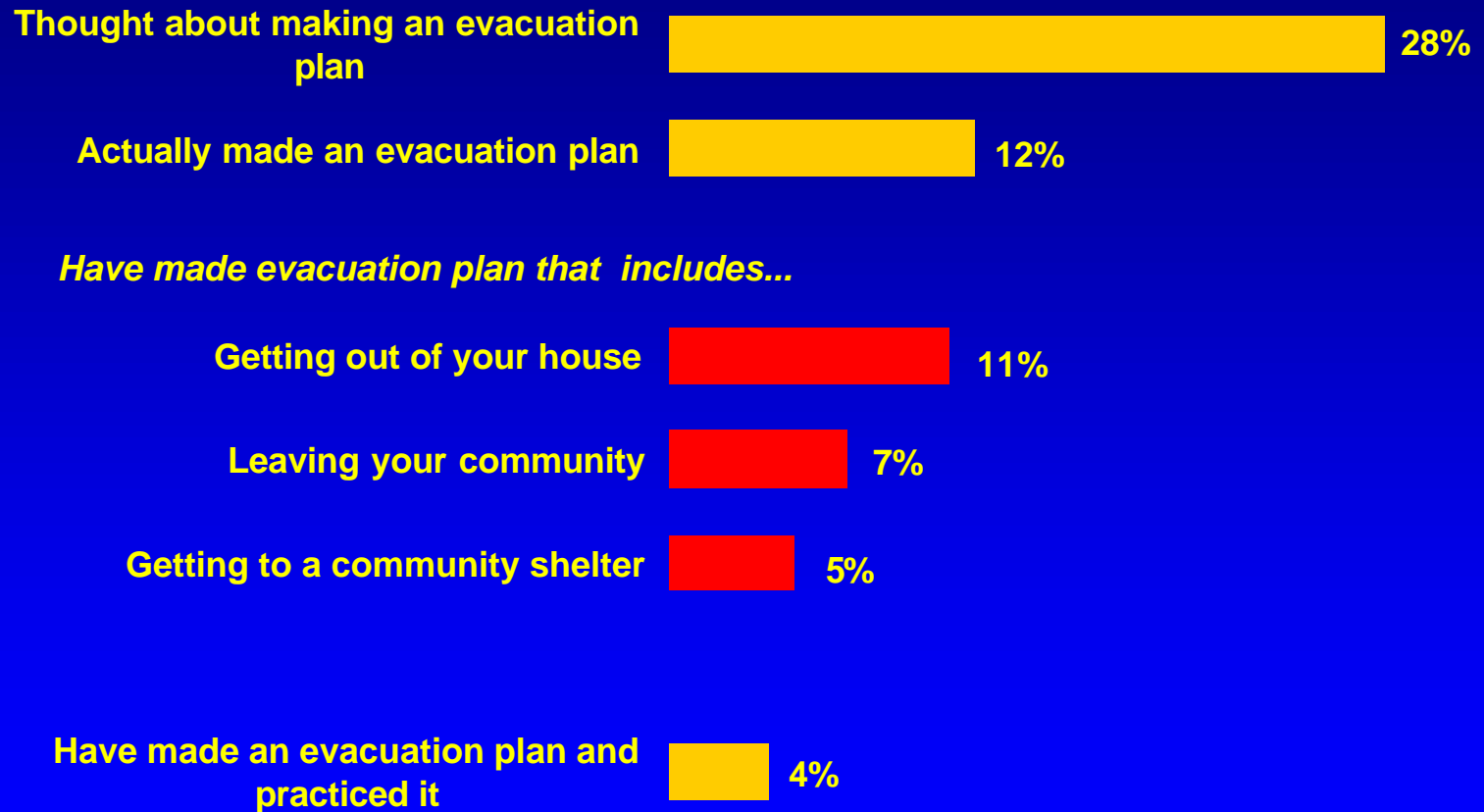
Americans are concerned about the level of precautions being taken in the places where they work or go to school. Among people who worked or went to school, only one-third of the public believed that the place where they worked or went to school had made adequate preparations for a terrorist attack. Further, only 22 percent of Americans reported that someone at work or school had discussed with them plans for evacuation of the building in the case of a terrorist attack.

Among parents with children in school or daycare, 50 percent reported that, to the best of their knowledge, the school or daycare had a plan in place for how to deal with a terrorist attack. Seventy-six percent of parents who knew of the plan said the school or daycare had done a good job in informing them of it. The majority of parents with children who attended school or daycare thought their children would be adequately cared for and safe if they had to remain at the school due to a terrorist attack for a day (85%), overnight (76%) or for three days (55%).

For more information on the Department of Homeland Security's recommended preparations in case of a terrorist attack, go to www.ready.gov

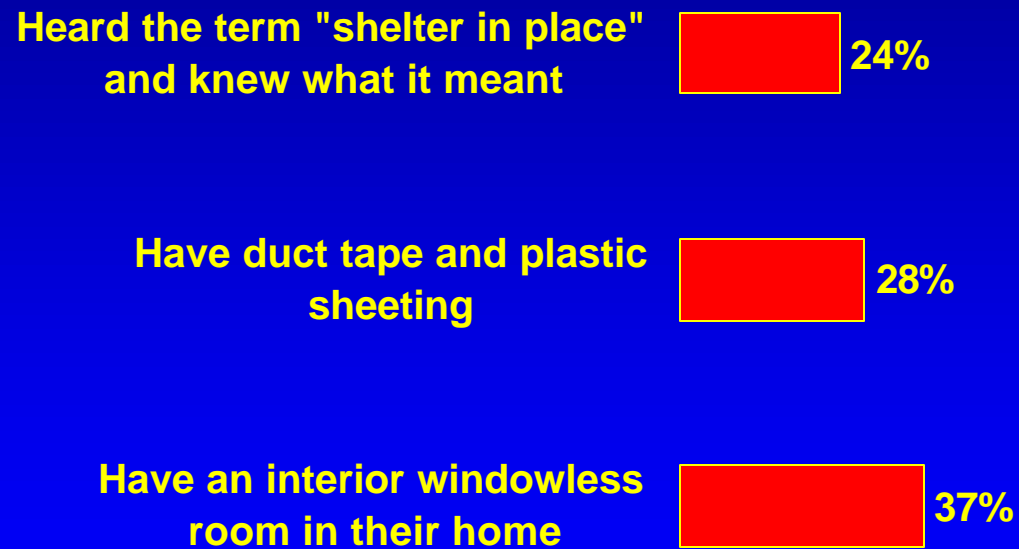
This study was designed and analyzed by researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health. The project director is Robert J. Blendon of the Harvard School of Public Health. The research team also includes Catherine M. DesRoches, John M. Benson, Kalahn Taylor-Clark, Kathleen Weldon and Liz Mackie of the Harvard School of Public Health and Melissa J. Herrmann of ICR/International Communications Research. Fieldwork was conducted via telephone by ICR/International Communications Research of Media (PA) between March 21 – 25, 2003, one month after the Department of Homeland Security launched its www.ready.gov site. The survey was conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,007 adults age 18 and over.

Evacuation Plans



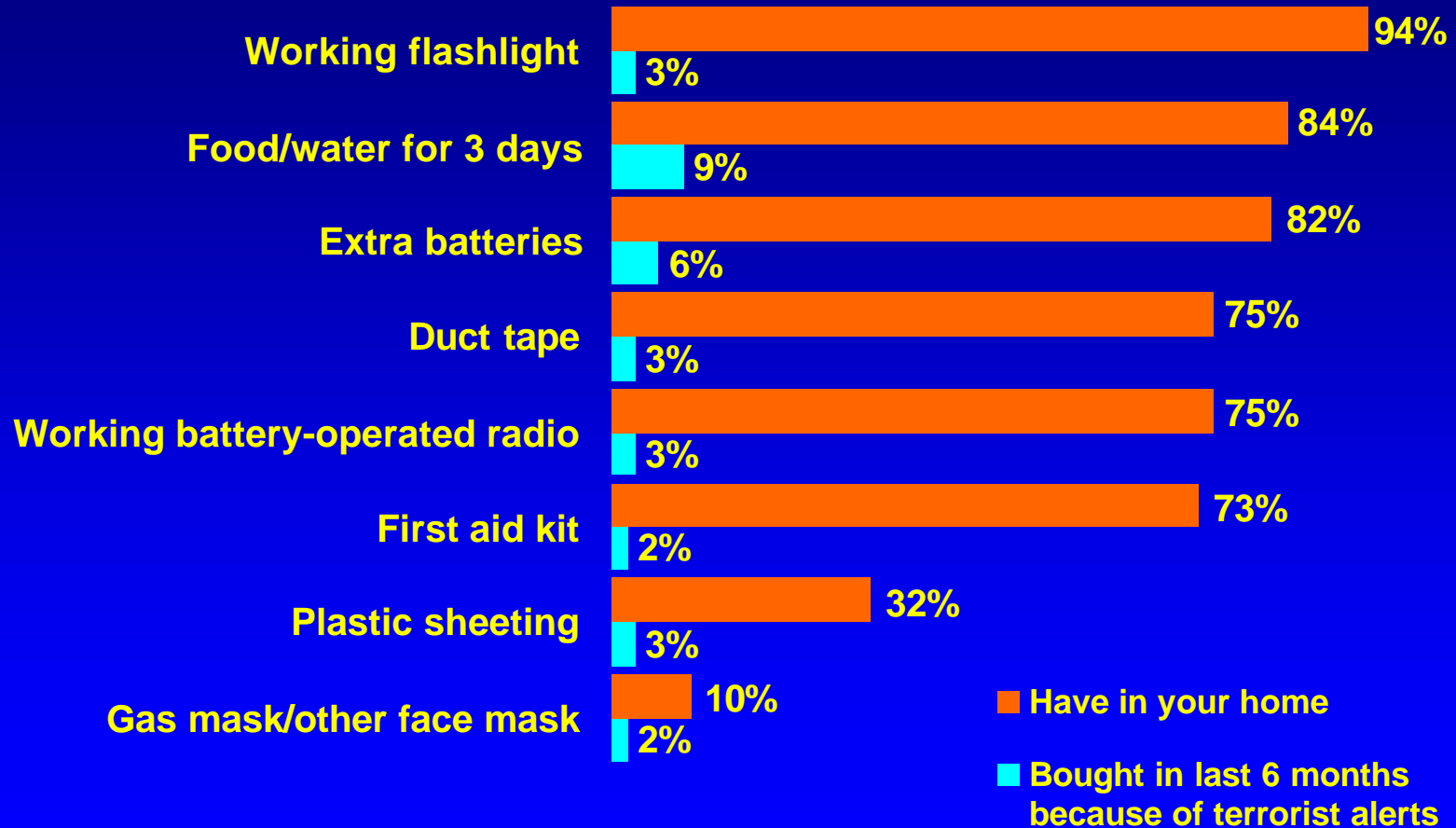
Source: Project on Biological Security and the Public, Harvard School of Public Health, March 21-25, 2003.

Sheltering In Place



Source: Project on Biological Security and the Public, Harvard School of Public Health, March 21-25, 2003.

Steps Americans Have Taken Because of Terrorist Threat



Source: Project on Biological Security and the Public, Harvard School of Public Health, March 21-25, 2003.

**Harvard School of Public Health
Project on Biological Security and the Public
Survey 5 – Readiness
Topline**

This study was conducted by telephone March 21 – March 25, 2003 among a nationally representative sample of 1007 respondents 18 years of age and older. Field work by ICR/International Communications Research of Media, PA. The sampling error was ± 3.1 percentage points.

Likelihood of an attack

RD-1. How concerned are you about the possibility there will be more major terrorist attacks in the United States? Is that something that worries you a great deal, somewhat, not too much, or not at all?

	CONCERNED			NOT CONCERNED			Don't know	Refused
	NET	A great deal	Somewhat	NET	Not too much	Not at all		
3/25/03	69	24	45	30	21	9	1	--

RD-2. Have your worries about more major terrorist attacks kept you from participating fully in work, school, housework, or other activities, or have you been able to carry out your usual daily activities?

	Kept you from participating fully	Been able to carry out usual daily activities	Not too/not at all worried about attacks	Don't know/refused if worried about attacks	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	5	64	30	1	*	--

RD-3. Have these worries led you to...(INSERT ITEM)?

	Yes	No	Not too/not at all worried about the attack	Don't know/refused if worried about the attack	Don't know	Refused
a. Smoke more, or not	6	64	30	1	--	*
b. Drink more alcohol, or not	1	68	30	1	*	*
c. Eat more, or not	7	62	30	1	*	--

RD-1/RD-3 Terrorist Attack and Activities Combination Table #3

	SMOKE, DRANK, ATE MORE				Didn't do any	Not too/not at all worried	Don't know/refused if worried about the attack
	NET	Smoked more	Drank more	Ate more			
3/25/03	12	6	1	7	58	30	1

RD-4. Do you think the US military action in Iraq makes it more or less likely that there will be a terrorist attack against the US, or doesn't it make a difference?

	More likely	Less likely	Doesn't make a difference	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	48	13	35	4	*

RD-5. When government officials talk about the need for Americans to have an evacuation plan in case of a terrorist attack, do you know what they mean or are you not sure what they mean?

	Know what they mean	Not sure what they mean	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	55	44	1	*

RD-6. Do you think an evacuation plan includes (INSERT ITEM) or doesn't it include this?

	Yes, includes	No, does not include	Don't know what they mean by evacuation plan/dk/ref	Don't know	Refused
a. A plan for getting out of your house	36	17	45	2	*
b. A plan for getting to a community shelter	42	11	45	2	*
c. A plan for getting out of your community	35	17	45	3	*

RD-5/RD-6 Evacuation Plan Combination Table

	Know what the evacuation plan means			Don't know what the evacuation plan means	Don't know	Refused	
	NET	Includes getting out of your house	Includes getting to a community shelter				Includes getting out of your community
3/25/03	55	36	42	35	44	1	*

RD-7. Recently, government officials have been using the term “shelter in place”. Please tell me if you have heard this term and know what it means, have heard this term but don't know what it means, or have not heard this term?

	Heard term and know what it means	Heard term and DO NOT know what it means	Have not heard term	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	24	15	61	*	*

Department of Homeland Security Terror Alert System

INTERVIEWER READ: As you may know, the federal government uses a color-coded terror alert system to let federal, state, and local authorities, as well as the public, know about the level risk of a terrorist attack.

RD-8. The federal government recently changed the level of alert in the “Homeland Security Advisory System”. Do you happen to know what color or alert level the country is now under? Is it red which is severe, orange which is high, yellow which is elevated, blue which is guarded, or green which is low?

	Orange which is high	INCORRECT					Don't know	Refused
		NET	Red which is severe	Yellow which is elevated	Blue which is guarded	Green which is low		
3/25/03	73	20	16	3	1	*	7	--

RD-10. How seriously do you take the Homeland Security Advisory System terror alerts? Very seriously, somewhat seriously, not too seriously, or not seriously at all?

	SERIOUSLY			NOT SERIOUSLY			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	Not at all		
3/25/03	78	39	38	21	14	7	1	*

RD-11 During periods of heightened terror alerts, do you take more precautions or don't you?

	Take more precautions	Do not take more precautions	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	31	67	2	--

RD-12 During the past 6 months have you talked with a health professional, therapist, or other counselor about any worries or anxieties you have had about a terrorist attack, or haven't you done this?

	Talked to a health professional	Have not talked to a health professional	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	2	97	--	*

Ready.gov

RD-13 Recently, the federal government put out information about how to protect yourself and your family in the event of a terrorist attack. Did you happen to read or hear anything about this information, or didn't you?

	Yes, read or heard information	No, did not read or hear information	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	55	44	1	--

RD-14 *(Asked of those who had read/heard about government information = 55%)*
Which of the following statements comes closer to your view? If I follow the government's recommendations, it will increase my chances of surviving a terrorist attack OR there is nothing I can do about surviving a terrorist attack so I am not taking these steps?

	Following the gov't recommendations will increase my chance of surviving	There is nothing I can do about surviving	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	56	38	5	2

RD-15 *(Asked of those who had read/heard about government information = 55%)*
Was the information that you heard or saw clear or did you find it confusing?

	Clear	Confusing	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	80	18	2	*

RD-16 *(Asked of those who had read/heard about government information = 55%)*
Do you think that you will follow all of the government's recommendations, some of these recommendations, or none of the recommendations?

	Follow ALL of their recommendations	Follow SOME of their recommendations	Follow NONE of their recommendations	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	15	75	11	*	--

RD-17 *(Asked of those who had read/heard about government information = 55%)*
Do you think the precautions that the government is asking the average citizen to take against a terrorist attack are too much, too little, or about the right amount?

	Too much	Too little	About the right amount	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	13	13	69	5	*

Preparation for a terrorist attack

RD-18 Now I'm going to ask you about how prepared you think different groups are to provide needed services in the aftermath of a major terrorist attack. If you haven't heard enough about a group to have an opinion, please just say so.

Would you say (INSERT ITEM) is very prepared, somewhat prepared, not too prepared, or not prepared at all to provide needed services in the aftermath of a terrorist attack?

a. Your local government

	PREPARED			NOT PREPARED			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	Not at all		
3/25/03	74	24	50	16	8	7	11	*

b Your local hospital

	PREPARED			NOT PREPARED			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	Not at all		
3/25/03	70	28	42	14	8	6	16	--

c The federal government

	PREPARED			NOT PREPARED			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	Not at all		
3/25/03	85	39	47	9	6	3	6	--

d. Your local health department

	PREPARED			NOT PREPARED			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Some what	NET	Not too	Not at all		
3/25/03	63	21	42	15	8	7	22	*

RD-19 To the best of your knowledge, has the local government in the community where you live and work, taken steps to prepare for a terrorist attack, or have they not taken such steps?

	Have taken steps	Have NOT taken steps	One but not the other	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	49	32	1	19	*

RD-20 I am going to read a list of things some people have in their homes. For each one, please say if this is something you currently have or do not have. Do you have (INSERT ITEM)?

	Currently have	Do not have	Don't know	Refused
a. A gas mask, other face mask, or protective clothing	10	90	--	*
b. Adequate supplies of food and water for 3 days	84	15	*	--
c. Duct tape	75	25	*	--
d. Plastic sheeting	32	68	1	--
e. A working battery operated radio	75	24	*	--
f. A working flashlight	94	6	*	--
g. A first aid kit	73	26	*	--
h. Extra batteries	82	18	*	--

RD-20a-h Summary Table for Number of Items

	3/25/03
Have none of these items	*
Have 1 item	3
Have 2 items	4
Have 3 items	8
Have 4 items	13
Have 5 items	20
Have 6 items	28
Have 7 items	18
Have 8 items	5
Don't know	--
Refused	--

RD-21 Is this something you bought in the last six months?

	Yes	No	Don't have it or dk/ref	Don't know	Refused
a. A gas mask, other face mask, or protective clothing	3	8	90	-	--
b. Adequate supplies of food and water for 3 days	39	45	16	*	*
c. Duct tape	16	58	25	1	--
d. Plastic sheeting	8	23	68	*	--
e. A working battery operated radio	10	66	25	--	--
f. A working flashlight	13	80	6	*	--
g. A first aid kit	8	65	27	*	--
h. Extra batteries	41	40	18	*	--

RD-22 Did you buy it because of the terrorist alerts or for some other reason?

	Because of terrorist alerts	Some other reason	Have it but didn't get it in the last 6 months	Don't have it or dk/ref	Don't know	Refused
a. A gas mask, other face mask, or protective clothing	2	1	8	90	--	--
b. Adequate supplies of food and water for 3 days	9	30	45	16	*	--
c. Duct tape	3	13	59	25	--	--
d. Plastic sheeting	3	5	24	68	--	--
e. A working battery operated radio	3	6	66	25	--	--
f. A working flashlight	3	11	80	6	--	--
g. A first aid kit	2	6	65	27	--	--
h. Extra batteries	6	35	40	18	--	--

RD-22a-h Summary Table

	3/25/03
Have bought 1 or more items because of the alerts (NET)	14
Have 1 item	6
Have 2 items	4
Have 3 items	1
Have 4 items	1
Have 5 items	1
Have 6 items	--
Have 7 items	*
Have 8 items	*

RD-23 Do you have a room in your house where you can “shelter in place”, that is a windowless room that you can seal off and have stocked with food and water, or don't you have this?

	Yes, have this windowless type of room	No, do not have this type of room	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	37	63	*	--

RD-24. Do you take prescription drugs on a regular or ongoing basis, or not?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	49	51	--	*

(Asked of total who take prescription drugs on a regular basis; n = 519)

RD-25. In the event of a terrorist attack, do you have at least an extra three week supply of the prescription drugs you take regularly, or not?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	55	43	2	--

(Asked of total who take prescription drugs on a regular basis but do not have an extra three week supply; n =230)

RD-26. Have you tried to get an extra supply of these prescription drugs or haven't you tried to do this?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	9	90	*	*

RD-24/RD-25/RD-26 Prescription Drug Supply Combination Table

	TAKE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS					Do not take prescription drugs	Don't know	Refused
	NET	Do not have an extra 3 week supply						
		Have extra 3 week supply	SUBNET	Tried to get one	Did not try to get one			
3/25/03	49	27	21	2	19	51	--	*

RD-27 Now I am going to read you a list of things people may have done to prepare for a terrorist attack. For each one, please tell me if this is something you have done or have not done. Have you (INSERT ITEM)?

	Have done	Have not done	Don't know	Refused
a. Made a plan for contacting family members in the event of a terrorist attack	30	70	*	--
b. Formed or joined a community group to assist in local planning in the event of a terrorist attack	3	97	--	--
c. Learned first aid	40	60	--	--
d. Gotten a prescription for or purchased antibiotics	10	89	*	*

RD-28. Have you thought about making an evacuation plan for yourself and your family, or haven't you thought about this?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	28	71	*	--

RD-29 Have you actually made an evacuation plan, or haven't you done this?

	Yes	No	Haven't thought about making plan/dk/ref	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	12	17	72	--	*

RD-30 Does it include a plan for getting out of your house?

	Yes	No	Thought about making plan, but haven't make plan/dk/ref	Haven't thought about making plan/dk/ref	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	11	1	17	72	--	--

RD-31 Does it include a plan for getting to a community shelter?

	Yes	No	Thought about making plan, but haven't make plan/dk/ref	Haven't thought about making plan/dk/ref	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	5	6	17	72	*	--

RD-32 Does it include a plan for leaving your community?

	Yes	No	Thought about making plan, but haven't make plan/dk/ref	Haven't thought about making plan/dk/ref	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	7	4	17	72	--	--

RD-33 Have you practiced your evacuation plan, or not?

	Yes	No	Thought about making plan, but haven't make plan/dk/ref	Haven't thought about making plan/dk/ref	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	4	7	17	72	--	--

RD-34 Now I'm going to read you a list of places you might turn to for information about how to protect yourself in the event of a terrorist attack. For each one, please tell me if you have gone there for this information in the past month. In the past month have you (INSERT ITEM)?

	Yes, have looked in the past month	No, have not looked in the past month	Don't know	Refused
a. Looked at the Centers for Disease Control website	6	94	--	--
b. Contacted or looked at the website of your local health department	6	94	--	--
c. Contacted or looked at the website of your local fire department	4	96	--	--
d. Looked at the Department of Homeland Security website, "Ready.gov"	7	93	*	--
e. Contacted or looked at the website of The American Red Cross	6	94	--	--

RD-35 Do you feel that the place where you work or go to school has made adequate preparations for a terrorist attack, or not?

	Yes	No	Don't work or go to school	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	31	45	18	6	*
Among those who work or go to school	38	55	NA	7	*

RD-36 At work or school, has anyone discussed with you plans for evacuation of the building in the case of a terrorist attack, or not?

	Yes	No	Don't work or go to school	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	22	59	18	1	*
Among those who work or go to school	27	72	NA	1	*

RD-37 Do you think that the city or community where you live or work might be a target for a terrorist attack, or not?

	Yes	No	One but not the other	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	29	67	*	4	--

Kids

(Asked of total with kids in the household; n = 353)

RD-38. Are your children in school or daycare, or not?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	79	20	*	*

(Asked of total with children in the household who attend school or daycare; n = 286)

RD-39. To the best of your knowledge, does the school or daycare have a plan for how to deal with a terrorist attack, or don't you know?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	50	12	38	--

(Asked of total with children in the household who attend school or daycare that has a plan for terrorist attack; n = 153)

RD-40. In your opinion, has the school or daycare done a good job or a bad job in informing you of the plan to deal with a terrorist attack?

	Good job	Bad job	Don't know	Refused
3/25/03	76	21	3	--

(Asked of total with children in the household who attend school or daycare; n = 286)

RD-41. Do you believe your children would be safe and adequately cared for if they had to remain in school or daycare (INSERT ITEM) due to a terrorist attack, or don't you believe this?

	Yes, believe children will be cared for	No, children will not be cared for	Children will not be cared for for a day/dk/ref	Don't know	Refused
a. For a day	83	14	NA	4	--
b. Overnight	76	5	17	1	--
c. For three days	55	17	24	4	--