GALLUP

July 18, 2012

Americans' Concerns About Obesity Soar, Surpass Smoking

More say obesity is "extremely serious" now than in the past

by Elizabeth Mendes

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Most Americans say obesity is an "extremely" or "very serious" problem to society, the 81% who do so is up significantly from 69% in 2005, the last time Gallup asked this question. Americans now see obesity as a more serious societal issue than cigarettes -- a change from the past.

How serious a problem do you think ______ is/are to society -- extremely serious, very serious, somewhat serious, or not serious?

% Extremely/Very serious

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Gallup has asked Americans how serious a problem obesity, cigarettes, and alcohol are to society three times since 2003. The combined percentage rating obesity as extremely or very serious has increased with each survey. While Americans became more concerned about all three issues in 2005, their concerns about cigarettes has since stayed the same and those about alcohol declined slightly.

Nearly four in 10 Americans now say obesity is an extremely serious problem to society, more than the 30% who say the same about cigarettes and 18% about alcohol. The percentage who say obesity is an extremely serious problem is also up from 27% in 2005.
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How serious a problem do you think _______ is/are to society -- extremely serious, very serious, somewhat serious, or not serious?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Extremely</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Not serious</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obesity</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cigarettes</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Majorities See Important Role for Government

Americans are equally likely to say it is extremely or very important to have federal government programs that address the health risks associated with obesity (57%) and smoking (55%), despite their higher level of concern about obesity. Slightly fewer say programs addressing excessive alcohol consumption are extremely or very important (48%).

How important is it to have federal government programs that address health risks associated with each of the following? Is it extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not important?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Extremely</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Not important</th>
<th>Extremely/Very</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Obesity</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoking</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive alcohol consumption</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Still, fewer Americans place high importance on government obesity programs than say the issue is an extremely or very serious societal problem -- likely reflecting the high priority Americans place on jobs and the economy currently, and their differing views on the role of the government.

Obesity Concerns Cross Party Lines, But GOP Less Likely to Want Gov't Programs

Republicans, independents, and Democrats agree that obesity is an extremely or very serious problem to society, with about eight in 10 in each party saying so. However, while the vast majority of Democrats think it is extremely or very important to have federal government programs to address obesity, fewer than three in 10 Republicans say the same.
These differences reflect the more general Republican-Democratic divide on the role of the government. Republicans tend to want the government’s role to be smaller, while Democrats lean more toward the government playing a larger role.

Implications

Americans are much more concerned about obesity now than they have been in the past -- with most saying it is an extremely or very serious societal problem. They also think it is more serious than smoking or alcohol.

The drastic increase in obesity over the past 20 years and Americans' awareness of it are likely contributing to their growing concerns about the problems it is causing society. First lady Michelle Obama's high-profile nationwide anti-childhood obesity campaign, launched in 2010, may have also affected Americans' perceptions of the severity of the issue.

To what degree Americans would support the government itself taking action to address obesity is less clear. While a large majority says it is extremely or very important to have federal government programs targeted toward obesity, they feel the same way about smoking. And, Republicans and Democrats disagree on that point -- most Democrats see it as an important issue for the government to address, while most Republicans do not.

Survey Methods

Results for this Gallup poll are based on telephone interviews conducted July 9-12, 2012, with a random sample of 1,014 adults, aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

For results based on the total sample of national adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is ±4 percentage points.

Interviews are conducted with respondents on landline telephones and cellular phones, with interviews conducted in Spanish for respondents who are primarily Spanish-speaking. Each sample includes a minimum quota of 400 cell phone respondents and 600 landline respondents per 1,000 national adults, with additional minimum quotas among landline respondents by region. Landline telephone numbers are chosen at random among listed telephone numbers. Cell phone numbers are selected using random digit dial methods. Landline respondents are chosen at random within each household on the basis of which member had the most recent birthday.

Samples are weighted by gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education, region, adults in the household, and phone status (cell phone-only/landline only/both, cell phone mostly, and having an unlisted landline number). Demographic weighting targets are based on the March 2011 Current Population Survey figures for the aged 18 and older non-institutionalized population living in U.S. telephone households. All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting and sample design.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

View methodology, full question results, and trend data.

For more details on Gallup's polling methodology, visit http://www.gallup.com/.
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