



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER
For The People & The Press

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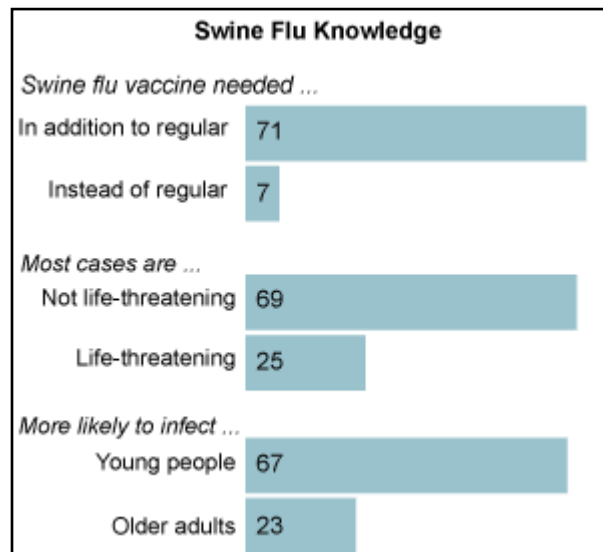
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Health Care Debate Still Top Story **PUBLIC AWARE OF KEY SWINE FLU FACTS**

In a busy late summer news stretch, Americans continued to track news about the health care debate more closely than other major stories last week. The economy, the death of Sen. Edward M. Kennedy and the strange case of a California woman rescued from long-time captors also vied for the public's attention.

Many also followed reports about preparations for the second wave of the swine flu this fall, but not at the interest levels seen during the first wave in early May. Still, large majorities do know several key facts about the H1N1 virus and the vaccine being developed to limit its spread. About seven-in-ten correctly answer questions about who is most likely to be infected by the virus, how serious most cases are expected to be and whether people will need a separate vaccine for the seasonal flu.

With repeated warnings in the media and from government officials about the upcoming flu season, a large majority (69%) knows that experts think most cases of the swine flu are not life-threatening. A similar proportion (67%) correctly says that the illness appears more likely to infect children and young adults than older adults. And 71% know that the government says the vaccine will need to be administered in addition to – not instead of – a separate vaccine for the usual seasonal flu.



According to the latest weekly News Interest Index survey, conducted August 28-31 among 1,006 adults by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, 30% say they followed the health care debate more closely than any

other story, while smaller shares chose the economy (17%), Kennedy’s death (17%) or the California case (14%) as the story they followed most closely. Kennedy’s death dominated media coverage, taking up 27% of the newshole, according to a separate analysis by the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism.

Only about one-in-ten (9%) say they most closely followed news about the impending swine flu outbreak and the availability of a vaccine. Reporting on swine flu amounted to 3% of coverage. The week of April 27-May 3, when reporting about swine flu took up 31% of the newshole, about four-in-ten (39%) said they were following the outbreak more closely than any other news story. No other story came close.

However, the public is voicing greater concern about its spread than in May: 45% say they are very (10%) or somewhat (35%) worried that they or a family member will be exposed to the swine flu. About a third (34%) say they are not too worried and 21% say they are not worried at all.

<i>Worry you or family member will be exposed...</i>	SARS <i>(2003)</i>	Staph infection <i>(2007)</i>	Swine flu <i>(May)</i>	Swine flu <i>(August)</i>
Very/Somewhat	35	44	36	45
Not too/at all	63	55	64	55
Don't know	2	1	*	*

Q3.

In May, as outbreaks were reported in many states – though with relatively few fatalities, 36% said they were very (8%) or somewhat worried (28%) about exposure to the flu strain. Another 37% said they were not too worried and 27% said they were not worried at all.

The current fears are similar to those seen in 2007 about exposure to a drug-resistant staph infection that was then in the news. That October, 44% said they were worried (12% very, 32% somewhat) that they or a family member could be exposed to the infection. About a third (32%) said they were not too worried and 23% said they were not worried at all.

With the fall flu season just getting started, 26% of Americans say they are following news about the swine flu and the availability of the vaccine very closely. In early May, during the spring outbreak, 43% said they were following the spread of the H1N1 virus very closely.

Swine Flu Worries and Knowledge

Women are more likely to be concerned about the spread of swine flu than men. More than half (54%) say they are worried that they or someone in their household will be exposed to the flu, compared with 35% of men. They also are more likely to say correctly that the virus is expected to infect more children and young adults than older adults (72% vs. 62%).

On the other two knowledge questions, there is little difference between men and women. There also is little difference on those questions between those with or without children under 18 in the household.

Overall, about four-in-ten (39%) answered two of the three knowledge questions correctly; 36% answered all three correctly and 21% answered just one right. About four-in-ten of those over 40 answered all three correctly, compared with 28% of those under 40. As is typical with knowledge questions, those with higher levels of education were more likely to answer the questions correctly than those with less education. Notably, there is little relationship between knowledge of swine flu and concern over exposure to the disease.

In terms of the severity of the illness, there are only limited differences based on age or gender in the percentages saying correctly that most cases are not life-threatening. Among partisans, about three-in-four Republicans (77%) and independents (73%) get that question right, compared with 59% of Democrats

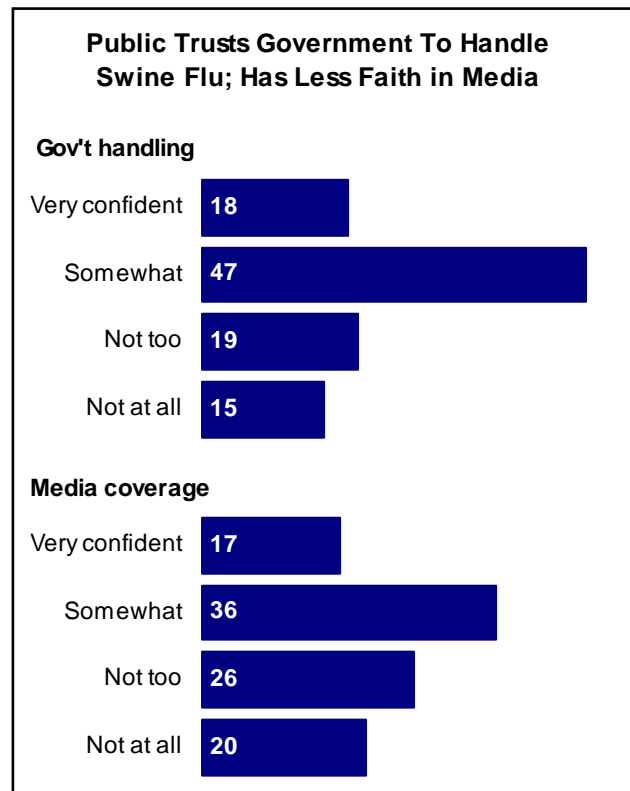
Large majorities across the board know that the government is recommending that Americans get a swine flu vaccine in addition to the seasonal flu shot.

Confidence in Government Efforts

Almost two-thirds of Americans say they are very (18%) or somewhat (47%) confident in the government's ability to deal with the swine flu; the remaining one third is not too (19%) or not at all (15%) confident in the government's ability to handle the virus. People are less confident in the media's ability to accurately report on the swine flu: Just more than half are very confident (17%) or somewhat confident (36%) in the press' ability to cover swine flu, while 46% have more doubts.

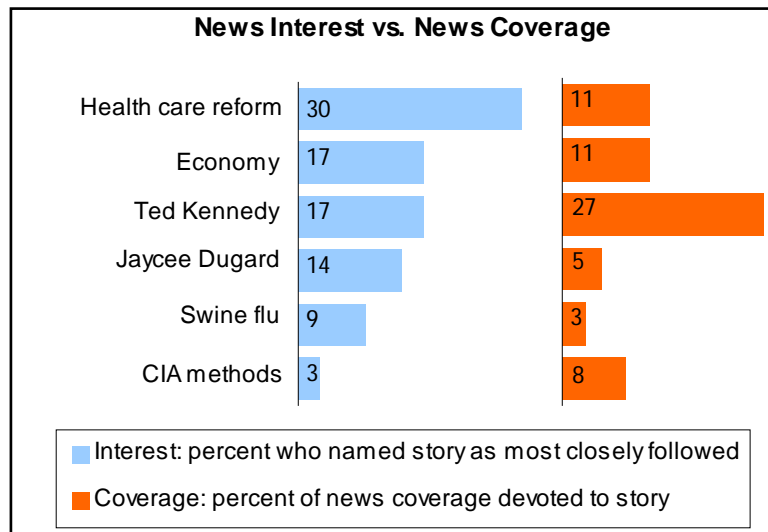
There is virtually no difference in opinion by gender, age or income when it comes to confidence in government, but Democrats are notably more likely to say they are confident in the government's ability to handle swine flu (76%) than are independents (64%) or Republicans (54%).

The pattern is similar for media confidence, though women are more likely than men to have confidence in the media's ability to report accurately on swine flu (58% confident versus 48% confident). About two-thirds of Democrats (65%), and half of Republicans (49%) and roughly half of independents (46%) express confidence in press coverage of the virus.



Top News Stories

In a busy news week, the public continued to name the health care debate as its top story. Three-in-ten say they followed news about health care more closely than any other story, and 40% say they paid very close attention to the reform debate. Interest was high despite the fact that coverage was lower than it had been in recent weeks. Some 11% of the newshole was devoted to the debate over health care reform, according to PEJ, down from 28% during the previous week.

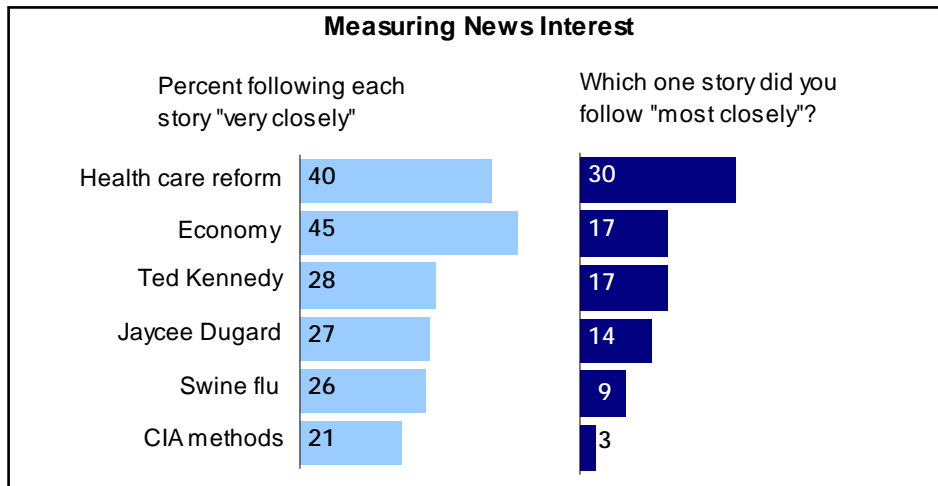


The public also maintained interest in news about the U.S. economy. Fully 45% followed economic news very closely, while 17% say this was the story they followed more closely than any other. Coverage of the economy equaled that of the health care debate, filling 11% of the newshole.

The media's top story of the week was far-and-away the death of Ted Kennedy: the 27% of newshole devoted to this story far outpaced coverage of the economy and health care. But the death of the last Kennedy brother did not top the public's news agenda. About three-in-ten (28%) followed news about Ted Kennedy's death very closely and 17% named it their top story of the week. Interest was significantly higher among Democrats (38% very closely) than among Republicans (21% very closely).

The discovery of Jaycee Dugard, a 29-year-old woman who had been kidnapped and held hostage in a California town since she was 11, attracted the very close attention of 27% of the public; 14% followed news about the story more closely than any other. Women under age 50 were especially likely to say they followed the story more closely than any other (23% did so).

News reports about swine flu and the availability of a vaccine were followed very closely by about a quarter of the public (26%), while 9% named news about swine flu as their top story of the week. The media devoted 3% of newshole to the story.



The public paid relatively little attention to reports about CIA interrogation methods and an investigation into alleged abuse of terrorism suspects. About two-in-ten (21%) say they followed the story very closely and just 3% name news about CIA interrogation methods as their top story of the week.

These findings are based on the most recent installment of the weekly News Interest Index, an ongoing project of the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. The index, building on the Center's longstanding research into public attentiveness to major news stories, examines news interest as it relates to the news media's coverage. The weekly survey is conducted in conjunction with The Project for Excellence in Journalism's News Coverage Index, which monitors the news reported by major newspaper, television, radio and online news outlets on an ongoing basis. In the most recent week, data relating to news coverage were collected from August 24-30, 2009 and survey data measuring public interest in the top news stories of the week were collected August 28-31, 2009 from a nationally representative sample of 1,006 adults.

About the News Interest Index

The *News Interest Index* is a weekly survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press aimed at gauging the public's interest in and reaction to major news events.

This project has been undertaken in conjunction with the Project for Excellence in Journalism's *News Coverage Index*, an ongoing content analysis of the news. The News Coverage Index catalogues the news from top news organizations across five major sectors of the media: newspapers, network television, cable television, radio and the internet. Each week (from Monday through Sunday) PEJ compiles this data to identify the top stories for the week. The News Interest Index survey collects data from Friday through Monday to gauge public interest in the most covered stories of the week.

Results for the weekly surveys are based on telephone interviews among a nationwide sample of approximately 1,000 adults, 18 years of age or older, conducted under the direction of ORC (Opinion Research Corporation). For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls, and that results based on subgroups will have larger margins of error.

For more information about the Project for Excellence in Journalism's News Coverage Index, go to www.journalism.org.

About the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

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PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
August 28-31, 2009 NEWS INTEREST INDEX OMNIBUS SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
N=1006

Q.1 As I read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past week, please tell me if you happened to follow each news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely. First, **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE] [IF NECESSARY “Did you follow [ITEM] very closely, fairly closely, not too closely or not at all closely?”]**

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
a. Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy	45	30	13	12	1
August 21-24, 2009	50	27	13	10	1
August 14-17, 2009	41	37	11	12	*
August 7-10, 2009	42	34	13	10	*
July 31-August 3, 2009	46	34	11	8	*
July 24-27, 2009	45	35	12	8	*
July 17-20, 2009	43	35	11	11	1
July 10-13, 2009	37	38	13	11	*
July 2-5, 2009	38	35	15	12	*
June 19-22, 2009	42	33	15	10	*
June 12-15, 2009	41	35	12	12	*
June 5-8, 2009	41	34	11	14	*
May 29-June 1, 2009	43	37	11	8	*
May 21-24, 2009	44	35	13	9	*
May 15-18, 2009	44	35	12	8	*
May 8-11, 2009	42	34	12	12	*
May 1-4, 2009	47	36	11	5	1
April 17-20, 2009	52	30	10	7	1
April 9-13, 2009	48	29	13	10	0
March 27-30, 2009	48	32	10	10	*
March 20-23, 2009	52	34	8	6	*
March 13-16, 2009	48	33	9	10	*
February 27-March 2, 2009	56	30	8	6	*
February 13-16, 2009	55	29	10	6	*
January 30-February 2, 2009	52	31	12	5	*
January 23-26, 2009	57	30	8	5	0
January 16-19, 2009	43	35	13	9	*
January 2-4, 2009	42	36	15	7	*
December 12-15, 2008	51	33	9	7	*
December 5-8, 2008	42	38	13	7	*
November 21-24, 2008	59	24	9	8	*
November 14-17, 2008	56	29	9	6	*
November 7-10, 2008	54	31	8	7	*
October 31-November 3, 2008	63	27	6	4	*
October 24-27, 2008	52	35	7	5	1
October 17-20, 2008	62	29	6	3	*
October 10-13, 2008	65	25	7	3	*
October 3-6, 2008	69	23	5	3	*
September 26-29, 2008	70	22	5	3	*
September 19-22, 2008	56	27	12	5	*
September 5-8, 2008	44	33	16	7	*
August 29-31, 2008	41	34	13	11	1
August 15-18, 2008	39	36	15	10	*
August 8-11, 2008	39	35	16	10	*

Q.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
August 1-4, 2008	47	34	11	8	0
July 25-28, 2008	46	32	10	12	*
July 18-21, 2008	45	33	13	9	*
July 11-14, 2008	44	33	12	10	1
June 27-30, 2008	49	31	12	7	1
June 13-16, 2008	42	33	14	11	*
May 9-12, 2008	45	31	13	11	*
May 2-5, 2008	43	31	15	10	1
April 18-21, 2008	41	35	13	10	1
April 4-7, 2008	39	37	12	12	*
March 28-31, 2008	42	36	14	8	*
March 20-24, 2008	45	33	13	9	*
February 29-March 3, 2008	38	35	15	11	1
February 15-18, 2008	37	36	11	16	8
February 1-4, 2008	40	37	14	8	1
January 18-21, 2008	42	31	16	11	*
January 11-14, 2008	36	32	15	16	1
November 2-5, 2007	27	37	16	19	1
October 19-22, 2007	25	34	20	21	*
August 10-13, 2007	28	36	18	18	*
Mid-November, 2006	31	40	17	11	1
December, 2005	35	35	18	11	1
Early November, 2005	35	39	17	9	*
Mid-May, 2005	30	39	19	11	1
January, 2005	35	41	17	7	*
Mid-October, 2004	30	43	16	10	1
Early September, 2004	39	34	15	11	1
Mid-January, 2004	37	41	15	7	*
December, 2003	35	38	14	11	2
November, 2003	40	34	15	10	1
October, 2003	32	39	16	12	1
September, 2003	39	30	18	12	1
March, 2003	40	35	16	8	1
February, 2003	42	33	15	10	*
January, 2003	40	35	13	11	1
December, 2002	38	34	17	10	1
February, 2002	35	40	15	9	1
January, 2002	30	44	16	9	1
December, 2001	37	40	13	8	2
Mid-November, 2001	41	36	15	7	1
June, 2001	24	41	18	16	1
May, 2001	34	36	15	15	0
April, 2001	36	34	16	13	1
February, 2001	30	39	18	12	1
January, 2001	32	38	17	11	2
June, 1995	26	41	22	11	*
March, 1995	27	45	19	9	*
February, 1995	23	41	22	13	1
December, 1994	28	43	20	9	*
October, 1994	27	40	20	12	1
June, 1994	25	42	23	10	*
May, 1994	33	40	16	10	1
January, 1994	34	39	16	10	1

Q.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
Early January, 1994	36	44	13	7	*
December, 1993	35	41	15	8	1
October, 1993	33	38	20	9	*
September, 1993	37	40	14	8	1
Early September, 1993	39	39	14	9	*
August, 1993	41	36	14	9	*
May, 1993	37	38	18	6	1
February, 1993	49	36	10	5	*
January, 1993	42	39	12	7	*
September, 1992	43	37	13	6	1
May, 1992	39	39	15	6	1
March, 1992	47	38	11	4	*
February, 1992	47	37	10	6	*
January, 1992	44	40	11	5	*
October, 1991	36	38	16	9	1
b. Debate over health care reform	40	28	17	14	1
August 21-24, 2009	49	24	12	15	1
August 14-17, 2009	39	31	15	15	1
TREND FOR COMPARISON:¹					
August 7-10, 2009: <i>Debate in Washington over health care reform</i>	40	27	17	15	1
July 31-August 3, 2009	47	26	14	13	1
July 24-27, 2009	44	28	15	13	*
July 17-20, 2009	33	31	13	21	2
July 10-13, 2009	24	29	20	27	*
June 26-29, 2009	29	26	20	25	1
June 19-22, 2009	28	28	20	23	*
June 12-15, 2009	29	26	18	26	*
May 15-18, 2009: <i>Debate over Obama's health care plans</i>	25	30	20	24	*
March 6-9, 2009: <i>Obama proposing a \$630 billion fund for overhauling health care</i>	41	32	13	14	*
September, 1994: <i>The Clinton administration's health care reform proposals</i>	32	41	18	9	*
June, 1994	34	40	19	7	*
May, 1994	37	37	16	9	1
January, 1994	38	38	15	9	*
Early January, 1994	40	40	14	6	*
December, 1993	45	35	12	7	1
October, 1993	44	32	17	6	1
September, 1993	49	34	11	6	*
August, 1993: <i>Reports about the White House task force on health care reform headed by Hillary Clinton</i>	27	32	25	15	1
June, 1993	28	38	19	15	*
May, 1993	30	30	25	14	1

¹ June 12-15, 2009 to August 7-10, 2009 asked about: "Debate in Washington over health care reform." May 15-18, 2009 asked about: "Debate over Barack Obama's health care plans." March 6-9, 2009 asked about: "Barack Obama proposing a \$630 billion fund for overhauling the U.S. health care system." September, 1993 through September, 1994 asked about: "The Clinton Administration's health care reform proposals." May, 1993 through August, 1993 asked about: "Reports about the White House task force on health care reform headed by Hillary Clinton."

Q.1 CONTINUED...

	<u>Very closely</u>	<u>Fairly closely</u>	<u>Not too closely</u>	<u>Not at all closely</u>	<u>DK/ Refused</u>
c. The death of Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy	28	32	22	17	*
TREND FOR COMPARISON					
June 13-16, 2008: <i>The death of Meet the Press host Tim Russert</i>	28	23	19	30	*
January 10-15, 2007: <i>The death and memorial services of Gerald Ford</i>	25	37	24	13	1
June, 2004: <i>Death and memorial services of Ronald Reagan</i>	40	30	17	11	2
July, 1999: <i>The death of John F. Kennedy, Jr., his wife and sister-in-law in a plane crash near Martha's Vineyard</i>	54	29	13	4	0
May, 1994: <i>Death and funeral of Richard Nixon</i>	36	37	17	10	*
d. Reports about swine flu and the availability of a vaccine	26	33	22	18	*
TREND FOR COMPARISON²:					
May 21-24, 2009	30	39	21	11	*
May 8-11, 2009	34	36	19	11	*
May 1-4, 2009	43	37	15	4	1
April 25-27, 2009	25	30	19	26	*
e. The discovery of a 29-year-old woman in California who had been kidnapped and held captive since she was 11	27	34	21	17	1
TREND FOR COMPARISON					
January 26-29, 2007: <i>News about two kidnapped boys who were found in Missouri</i>	23	31	21	24	1
January 19-22, 2007: <i>Two kidnapped boys found in Missouri</i>	27	35	20	17	1
March, 2003: <i>The Utah girl found alive nine months after being kidnapped from her home</i>	34	36	20	10	*
September, 2002: <i>News stories about kidnapped children</i>	49	30	14	6	1
f. Reports about CIA interrogation methods and an investigation into alleged abuse of terrorism suspects	21	22	23	33	1
TREND FOR COMPARISON					
August 21-24, 2009: <i>The CIA reportedly hiring contractors to assassinate Al Qaeda leaders</i>	11	17	24	44	3
July 17-20, 2009: <i>Reports about a CIA program to kill Al Qaeda leaders that was hidden from Congress</i>	12	19	20	47	3

² May 21-24, 2009 and May 8-11, 2009 asked about: "Reports about swine flu in the U.S. and elsewhere." For May 1-4, 2009 the story was listed as: "The outbreak of swine flu in different parts of the world." For April 25-27, 2009 the story was listed as: "Reports of swine flu in Mexico and the U.S."

Q.2 Which ONE of the stories I just mentioned have you followed most closely, or is there another story you've been following MORE closely? [DO NOT READ LIST. ACCEPT ONLY ONE RESPONSE.]

- 30 Debate over health care reform
- 17 Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy
- 17 The death of Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy
- The discovery of a 29-year-old woman in California who had been kidnapped and held 14 captive since she was 11
- 9 Reports about swine flu and the availability of a vaccine
- Reports about CIA interrogation methods and an investigation into alleged abuse of terrorism suspects
- 3 Some other story (VOL.)
- 7 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

Now thinking about the swine flu that's been in the news lately ...

Q.3 How worried are you that you or someone in your family will be exposed to this flu – very worried, somewhat worried, not too worried, or not worried at all?

		May 1-4 2009	<i>Staph infection</i> ³ Oct 19-22, 2007	<i>SARS</i> May 2003
10	Very worried	8	12	12
35	Somewhat worried	28	32	23
34	Not too worried	37	32	31
21	Not worried at all	27	23	32
*	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	*	1	2

Here are a few questions about what experts have been saying about a possible outbreak of the swine flu. Not everyone will have heard about these.

Q.4 From what you have heard, is the swine flu more likely to infect [older adults] or more likely to infect [children and young adults]? [RANDOMIZE ITEMS]

- 23 Older adults
- 67 Children and young adults
- 10 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

Q.5 The government is developing a vaccine for the swine flu, which is expected to be ready this fall. From what you have heard, is the government recommending that people get the swine flu vaccine INSTEAD of the regular flu vaccine or IN ADDITION TO the regular flu vaccine?

- 7 Instead of
- 71 In addition to
- 23 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

Q.6 From what you've seen and heard, are most cases of the swine flu life-threatening, or not?

- 25 Most life-threatening
- 69 Most not life-threatening
- 6 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

³ Oct 19-22, 2007 asked: "Now thinking about the drug-resistant staph infection that's been in the news lately. How worried are you that you or someone in your family will be exposed to this infection – very worried, somewhat worried, not too worried, or not worried at all?" In May 2003, the question read, "One last question about the new disease known as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, or SARS. How worried are you that you or someone in your family will be exposed to SARS – very worried, somewhat worried, not too worried, or not at all worried?"

Q.7 How confident are you in the government's ability to deal with the swine flu? **[READ]**

18	Very confident
47	Somewhat confident
19	Not too confident
15	Not at all confident
2	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

Q.8 How confident are you in the media's ability to accurately report on the swine flu? **[READ]**

17	Very confident
36	Somewhat confident
26	Not too confident
20	Not at all confident
1	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)