



News Release

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For further information contact:

Andrea Miller at 212-979-1533

Lauren Asher at 650-854-9400

SURVEY: MORE YOUNG PEOPLE GOING ONLINE FOR HEALTH INFORMATION THAN TO SHOP, CHECK SPORTS SCORES OR CHAT

*Many Teen Health Seekers Blocked by Filtering Technology,
But Two-Thirds Support It in Schools and Libraries*

NEW YORK, NY – A new national survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation finds teens and young adults (ages 15-24) are not only going online to shop, talk to friends, or download music, but also to look up information about health issues from diabetes to AIDS. Two out of three young people (68%) have used the Internet to search for health information, and one in four says they get “a lot” of health information online. The survey also suggests that a significant proportion of youth are acting on what they find: four out of ten (39%) online health seekers say they have changed their own behavior because of information they found on the Web.

The survey report, *Generation Rx.com*, includes findings on how young people use the Internet as a health resource, their concerns about confidentiality, their opinions on filtering technology and online pornography, and new data on where and how often teens and young adults are going online. Ninety percent of all young people have been online. Of these online youth, about three-fourths have searched for health information (75%), played games (72%), or downloaded music (72%), while fewer have participated in chats (67%), shopped (50%) or checked sports scores (46%). The majority (55%) of those who have surfed the Web for health information do so just a few times a year, but nearly four in ten (39%) do so at least once a month.

“The Internet isn’t just about fun and games for young people anymore,” said Victoria Rideout, Vice President and Director of the Program for the Study of Entertainment Media and Health at the Kaiser Family Foundation. “We need to pay attention to the quality and reliability of the health information reaching this important audience through the Internet.”

The survey found that half (50%) of all online youth have searched the Web for information on specific diseases such as cancer or diabetes. Sensitive, youth-oriented topics are also popular: about four in ten (44%) online youth have turned to the Internet for information about sexual health, including pregnancy, birth control, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, and about one in four have looked up information on weight issues (25%), mental health (23%), drugs and alcohol (23%), and violence (23%).

Almost all young people who have looked for health information on the Internet say that what they find is useful (94%, including 39% who say it is “very useful”), but they remain skeptical about the quality of online health information in general. When asked about a variety of sources, 17% say they trust health information from the Internet “a lot,” as compared to 85% for doctors, 68% for parents, and 30% for the television news. And although a large majority of young people (73%) say that knowing who produced health information is very important to them, only 29% of those who looked up health information online checked the source the last time they conducted a search.

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The survey also found that most young people (82%) identify confidentiality as “very important” when looking for health information. Most also feel the Internet offers that confidentiality: three out of four (76%) agree that the Web is good because they can look things up without anybody knowing it. At the same time, a sizable minority are concerned about privacy issues, such as having to use a computer where people can see what they’re doing (38%) or worrying that computers might keep track of what they do online (40%).

“The confidentiality of the Internet makes it an especially appealing destination for young people interested in sensitive issues like sex, drugs or depression,” Ms. Rideout continued.

Majority of Teens Support Filters, Divided on Effects of Exposure to Online Pornography

In December 2000, Congress passed legislation requiring federally funded schools and libraries to install filtering or blocking technology on all computers with Internet access. About two out of three (63%) 15- to 17-year-olds say they favor this law.

At the same time, nearly half (46%) of 15- to 17-year-olds who have sought health information online say they have been blocked from sites that were not pornographic. Among the topics they were researching when blocked were health issues such as HIV, other STDs, or birth control (15% of those who were blocked), cancer (8%), and information about sexual orientation (2%).

Among teens (ages 15-17) online, 70% say they have accidentally come across pornography on the Web, with just under half (45%) saying they were upset by the experience. While a majority in this age group (57%) believes that being exposed to online pornography could have a serious impact on those under 18, a sizable minority (41%) says such exposure “is no big deal.”

Nearly All Teens Have Been Online, But Race and Class Still Factors in Access

The survey found that 90% of teens and young adults have ever gone online, and that half (49%) of those online plug in once a day or more. Three out of four young people (74%) have access at home, and nearly one in three (31%) has access from their own bedroom.

While Internet use among youth is now widespread, differences in access across racial and socio-economic lines still exist. For example, one in four Hispanic youths has never gone online, compared to just 6% of white youth and 13% of African American youth. Eighty percent of all white respondents have Internet access from home, compared to 66% of African Americans and 55% of Hispanics. Socio-economic disparities also persist: 85% of youth from self-defined working class or lower class backgrounds have been online, compared with 91% of middle class and 93% of upper and upper-middle class youth.

Survey Methodology: *Generation Rx.com* is a nationally representative, random sample telephone survey of 1,209 young people ages 15-24. The survey was designed and analyzed by the Kaiser Family Foundation in consultation with International Communications Research (ICR). Fieldwork was conducted by ICR September 24 - October 31, 2001. The margin of error for the total sample is plus or minus 2.9 percentage points.

Additional copies of the report, *Generation Rx.com: How Young People Use the Internet for Health Information* (Pub #3202) are available free online at www.kff.org, or by calling the Kaiser Family Foundation’s publication request line at 1-800-656-4533.

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