

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **WSJ.com/Harris Interactive Survey Finds that Most Adults Believe Parents, Schools and Food Industry Can Make Difference in Battling Childhood Obesity**

**ROCHESTER, N.Y. – August 30, 2007** – According to the National Center for Health Statistics, sixteen percent of children and adolescents in the United States were overweight as of 2002, and the prevalence of childhood obesity has been rising steadily over the past two decades.<sup>1</sup> Most U.S. adults and parents with children under the age of twelve worry about childhood obesity, with more than eight in ten (84%) U.S. adults believing it is “a major problem” and 78 percent of parents saying the same.

A large majority of both groups believes that parents, above a wide variety of other groups, can have the greatest impact in reducing childhood obesity; majorities of U.S. adults (83%) and parents (85%) both say that parents have the greatest impact. However, many adults also feel that schools, government and the food industry have a role to play.

These are some of the results of an online survey of 2,503 U.S. adults, ages 18 and older, of whom 573 are parents or guardians of children age 12 or younger, conducted by Harris Interactive between August 6 and 8, 2007 for The Wall Street Journal Online’s Health Industry Edition ([www.wsj.com/health](http://www.wsj.com/health)).

Compared to one year ago, adults are more likely to consider advertising directed to children as a major contributor to the rising rate of childhood obesity (78% vs. 65%). They are also increasingly likely to believe that government should play a more active role in regulating the types of marketing and advertising that the food industry directs toward children (60% vs. 53%) and that public schools should do more to limit children’s access to unhealthy foods (88% vs. 83%). A large majority (94%) also believes that public schools should do more to promote regular exercise.

Some of the nation’s largest food and drinks companies recently announced that they will make a number of changes in their marketing practices to children and these initiatives are favored by most adults and parents with children under the age of twelve. Most adults and parents favor implementing the use of child-friendly characters to promote healthier foods (91% of adults, 92% of parents), limiting advertising to healthier foods (73%, 75%), and restricting the use of popular characters from television shows and movies (64%, 63%). Far fewer (43%, 45%), by comparison, favor prohibiting advertising to children under the age of twelve.

Katherine Binns, Division President for Healthcare Research at Harris Interactive, comments, “The public believes that many players can make a difference in battling the growing epidemic of childhood obesity. In the end, these findings suggest that by taking steps to address the public’s rising concerns, the food industry will be able to dampen public demand for increased regulation and oversight of its marketing practices.”

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Center for Health Statistics, January 11, 2007

**TABLE 1  
PUBLIC CONCERNS REGARDING CHILDHOOD OBESITY**

“Based on what you know or have heard, do you believe that childhood obesity in the U.S. is...?”

Base: All adults

		All Adults	Parent or Guardian of Child 12 and Under
		%	%
A major problem	2005	77	70
	2006	84	74
	2007	84	78
A minor problem	2005	21	27
	2006	15	21
	2007	15	19
Not a problem at all	2005	2	3
	2006	2	4
	2007	1	3

Note: Percentages may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.

**TABLE 2  
WHO COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN REDUCING CHILDHOOD OBESITY?**

“If you had to choose just **two**, which ones do you believe could have the greatest impact on reducing childhood obesity in this country?”

Base: All adults

	Total	Parents/ Guardians of Children Age 12 or Younger
	%	%
Parents	83	85
Schools	28	26
Food and drinks companies	27	27
Family members (other than parents)	13	15
The media	12	11
Physicians and other healthcare providers	7	9
The entertainment industry	7	7
Children’s friends	7	4
Healthcare professionals	5	5
Government	2	2
Local communities	2	1
Public health agencies	1	1
Health insurers or managed care plans	1	1
Some other group	1	1

Note: Multiple-response question.

**TABLE 3A  
PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS REGARDING CHILDHOOD OBESITY**

"How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?"

Base: All Adults

		All Adults			Parent or Guardian of Child 12 and Under		
		Agree Strongly/ Somewhat	Disagree Strongly/ Somewhat	Not Sure	Agree Strongly/ Somewhat	Disagree Strongly/ Somewhat	Not Sure
		%	%	%	%	%	%
Advertising by the food industry that is directed towards children is a major contributor to the rising rate of childhood obesity.	<b>2005</b>	68	27	5	69	24	7
	<b>2006</b>	65	31	4	67	29	4
	<b>2007</b>	78	18	3	76	19	5
If children in the U.S. are becoming obese it's because parents are not paying enough attention to their eating habits, not because of the food industry's marketing and advertising.	<b>2005</b>	83	14	4	86	10	4
	<b>2006</b>	81	14	5	82	12	5
	<b>2007</b>	83	15	2	81	16	3
The government should play a more active role in regulating the types of marketing and advertising that the food industry directs toward children.	<b>2005</b>	55	41	4	55	38	7
	<b>2006</b>	53	42	5	56	39	5
	<b>2007</b>	60	36	4	60	36	4
Public schools should do more to limit children's access to unhealthy foods like snack foods, sugary soft drinks and fast food.	<b>2005</b>	83	14	3	84	12	5
	<b>2006</b>	83	13	4	83	14	3
	<b>2007</b>	88	10	2	88	9	3
Public schools should do more to promote regular exercise, including regular recess.	<b>2005</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-
	<b>2006</b>	93	3	5	93	2	5
	<b>2007</b>	94	3	3	94	3	3
If parents set limits on their children's use of computers, television and video games, their children will become more physically active.	<b>2007</b>	89	8	4	90	8	2

Note: Percentages may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.

"-" Not applicable

**TABLE 3B  
PERCEPTIONS REGARDING CHILDHOOD OBESITY --  
PARENT OR GUARDIAN OF CHILD AGE 12 AND UNDER**

"How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?"

Base: Parent or Guardian of Child Age 12 and Under (n=573)

	<b>Agree Strongly/ Somewhat (Net)</b>	<b>Agree Strongly</b>	<b>Agree Somewhat</b>	<b>Disagree Strongly/ Somewhat (Net)</b>	<b>Disagree Somewhat</b>	<b>Disagree Strongly</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Advertising by the food industry that is directed towards children is a major contributor to the rising rate of childhood obesity.	<b>76</b>	36	40	<b>19</b>	14	6	5
If children in the U.S. are becoming obese it's because parents are not paying enough attention to their eating habits, not because of the food industry's marketing and advertising.	<b>81</b>	44	38	<b>16</b>	12	4	3
The government should play a more active role in regulating the types of marketing and advertising that the food industry directs toward children.	<b>60</b>	30	30	<b>36</b>	20	16	4
Public schools should do more to limit children's access to unhealthy foods like snack foods, sugary soft drinks and fast food.	<b>88</b>	57	31	<b>9</b>	5	4	3
Public schools should do more to promote regular exercise, including regular recess.	<b>94</b>	71	23	<b>3</b>	2	1	3
If parents set limits on their children's use of computers, television and video games, their children will become more physically active.	<b>90</b>	62	28	<b>8</b>	6	2	2

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

**TABLE 3C**  
**PERCEPTIONS REGARDING CHILDHOOD OBESITY --**  
**ALL ADULTS**

“How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?”

Base: All Adults

	<b>Agree Strongly/ Somewhat (Net)</b>	<b>Agree Strongly</b>	<b>Agree Somewhat</b>	<b>Disagree Strongly/ Somewhat (Net)</b>	<b>Disagree Somewhat</b>	<b>Disagree Strongly</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Advertising by the food industry that is directed towards children is a major contributor to the rising rate of childhood obesity.	<b>78</b>	38	40	<b>18</b>	12	6	3
If children in the U.S. are becoming obese it's because parents are not paying enough attention to their eating habits, not because of the food industry's marketing and advertising.	<b>83</b>	46	37	<b>15</b>	12	3	2
The government should play a more active role in regulating the types of marketing and advertising that the food industry directs toward children.	<b>60</b>	26	33	<b>36</b>	20	16	4
Public schools should do more to limit children's access to unhealthy foods like snack foods, sugary soft drinks and fast food.	<b>88</b>	59	29	<b>10</b>	7	3	2
Public schools should do more to promote regular exercise, including regular recess.	<b>94</b>	70	24	<b>3</b>	2	1	3
If parents set limits on their children's use of computers, television and video games, their children will become more physically active.	<b>89</b>	60	28	<b>8</b>	6	2	4

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

**TABLE 4**  
**PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR INITIATIVES TO MANAGE ADVERTISING TO CHILDREN**

“Some of the nation’s largest food and drinks companies have announced a number of changes in their advertising practices to children under the age of 12. Based on what you know or have heard, to what extent would you favor or oppose taking the following steps to combat childhood obesity?”

Base: All Adults

	Total			Parent or Guardian of Child 12 and Under		
	Strongly/ Somewhat Favor	Strongly/ Somewhat Oppose	Not Sure	Strongly/ Somewhat Favor	Strongly/ Somewhat Oppose	Not Sure
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Using child-friendly characters to promote healthier foods like fruits and vegetables	91	4	5	92	4	4
Limiting advertising to children to healthier foods that are lower in calories, fat and/or sugar	73	19	7	75	17	8
No longer using popular characters from television shows and movies to market products to children	64	27	9	63	28	9
Prohibiting advertising at all to children under the age of 12	43	46	11	45	46	9
<b>Favor at Least One Initiative (NET)</b>	<b>96</b>			<b>96</b>		

Note: Percentages may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.

**Methodology**

Harris Interactive® conducted this online survey within the United States between August 6 and 8, 2007 among a national cross section of 2,503 (573 of whom are parents or guardians of children age 12 or younger), ages 18 years and over. Figures for age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, income and region were weighted where necessary to align with population proportions. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All surveys are subject to several sources of error. These include: sampling error (because only a sample of a population is interviewed); measurement error due to question wording and/or question order, deliberately or unintentionally inaccurate responses, nonresponse (including refusals), interviewer effects (when live interviewers are used) and weighting.

With one exception (sampling error) the magnitude of the errors that result cannot be estimated. There is, therefore, no way to calculate a finite “margin of error” for any survey and the use of these words should be avoided.

With pure probability samples, with 100 percent response rates, it is possible to calculate the probability that the sampling error (but not other sources of error) is not greater than some number. With pure probability samples of 2,503 one could say with a ninety-five percent probability that the results would have a sampling error of +/-2 percentage points. Sampling error for data based on sub-samples would be higher and may vary. However, that does not take other sources of error into account. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

**About The Wall Street Journal Online**

The Wall Street Journal Online at WSJ.com, published by Dow Jones & Company (NYSE: DJ; [www.dowjones.com](http://www.dowjones.com)), is the largest paid subscription news site on the Web. Launched in 1996, the Online Journal continues to attract quality subscribers who are at the top of their industries, with 983,000 subscribers world-wide as of Q2, 2007. The Wall Street Journal Online network includes CareerJournal.com, OpinionJournal.com, StartupJournal.com, RealEstateJournal.com and CollegeJournal.com.

The Online Journal provides in-depth business news and financial information 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with insight and analysis, including breaking business and technology news and analysis from around the world. It draws on the Dow Jones network of nearly 1,900 business and financial news staff – the largest network of business and financial journalists in the world.

In 2007, the Online Journal received the Webby Award for Best Website in the Financial Services category. In 2005, the Online Journal was awarded a Codie Award for Best Online News Service for the second consecutive year, and its Health Industry Edition was awarded Best Online Science or Technology Service for the third consecutive year.

### **About Harris Interactive**

Harris Interactive is the 13th largest and fastest-growing market research firm in the world. The company provides innovative research, insights and strategic advice to help its clients make more confident decisions which lead to measurable and enduring improvements in performance. Harris Interactive is widely known for The Harris Poll, one of the longest running, independent opinion polls and for pioneering online market research methods. The company has built what it believes to be the world's largest panel of survey respondents, the Harris Poll Online. Harris Interactive serves clients worldwide through its North American, European and Asian offices, and through a global network of independent market research firms. More information about Harris Interactive may be obtained at [www.harrisinteractive.com](http://www.harrisinteractive.com).

To become a member of the Harris Poll Online and be invited to participate in online surveys, register at [www.harrispollonline.com](http://www.harrispollonline.com).

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