

“ Wait, Educate Before You Self-Medicate ”


New Data Suggest That Despite Knowing the Risk of Self-Medication, 76 Percent of American Adults Use Non-Prescription Medications for Themselves and Their Children

Bridgewater, NJ (March 19, 2008) – New survey results released today reveal that, while most U.S. adults take non-prescription or over-the-counter medications to treat a variety of common illnesses in order to save time, money and a trip to the doctor, many may be placing themselves or their children at risk by leaving the healthcare provider out of the equation. This survey, conducted by Harris Interactive® on behalf of the National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPPIE) with support from sanofi-aventis US, sought to identify and understand the types of conditions for which consumers are most likely to self-medicate themselves and their children. The survey also examined the factors that motivate consumers to take non-prescription or over-the-counter medications before or instead of consulting their doctor.

According to the survey, 29 percent of consumers reported that they typically self-treat seasonal allergies and 14 percent reported self-medicating year-round allergies. Although 9 of 10 adults who self-medicate conditions such as cough and cold, seasonal or year-round allergies, heartburn, or severe headaches, cited familiarity with how to treat their own (90%) or their child's illness (93%) due to past experience treating the condition; the majority (76%) recognized that self-medicating with non-prescription medications can pose possible risks. About one in five adults who typically self-medicate report that they have not used non-prescription medications as directed, either by taking more than the recommended dose (20%) or by taking these medications more frequently than indicated (17%). When asked specifically about self-treatment for seasonal allergies, 68 percent of seasonal allergy sufferers who typically treat their symptoms with non-prescription medications have driven a car while doing so, even though some of these medications may cause the user to be impaired and their labels state to use caution when driving a motor vehicle or operating machinery.

“No matter what medication you are taking, whether it is prescription or over-the-counter, medicines should always be taken with care,” says Ray Bullman, Executive Vice President of the National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPPIE). “By asking questions, carefully following instructions on the OTC Drug Facts label or the printout accompanying prescription medicines, sharing information with your doctor or pharmacist and responsibly educating yourself about the medication you are taking, you can significantly reduce any associated risks.”

The survey results also revealed that more than four in five adults (82%) typically self-medicate for various health conditions they have experienced in the past year that may be treated or relieved by non-prescription medication, the most common of which are colds (56%), coughs (37%) and seasonal allergies (29%). However,



while many self-medicate because it is more convenient (86%) or because they believe their illness is not serious enough to warrant a doctor's visit (78%), more often than not, their symptoms continue. Results show that 70 percent of adults who treat their cold and/or seasonal allergy symptoms with non-prescription medications experience persistent symptoms, such as nasal congestion (35%), which leads them to consult their doctor or to seek an alternate treatment, which may cost them more time and money.

"At times it can be very difficult for individuals to distinguish the symptoms of a viral cold from those symptoms due to seasonal allergies. Therefore, to get an accurate diagnosis and appropriate recommendations for prescription and non-prescription medication, it is helpful in such situations for people to seek advice from their healthcare provider," says Dr. Eli Meltzer, co-director of the Allergy & Asthma Medical Group and Research Center in San Diego, Calif.

About the Survey

Harris Interactive conducted this telephone survey on behalf of the National Council on Patient Information and Education with support from sanofi-aventis between January 18 and January 21, 2008. A nationally representative sample of 1,005 adults ages 18+ were interviewed, of whom, 650 typically self-medicate before or instead of consulting their doctor. For complete methodology, including weighting variables, please visit www.BeMedWise.org.

About NCPIE

Founded in 1982, the National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE) is a non-profit coalition of over 100 organizations. NCPIE's mission is to stimulate and improve communication of information on the appropriate use of medicines to consumers and health care professionals. NCPIE develops programs, provides educational resources, and offers services to advance the common mission of its members.

About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive is one of the largest and fastest-growing market research firms 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.

To become a member of the Harris Poll Online and be invited to participate in online surveys, register at www.harrispollonline.com.

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