

Kelly Gullo
585.214.7172
kgullo@harrisinteractive.com

Public Support for Stem Cell Research Remains High, but Differences Widen Between Supporters and Detractors

Most adults, regardless of party identification or religious affiliation, believe embryonic stem cell research should be allowed. Support has remained high over the past year as nearly three-quarters (74%) of U.S. adults believe stem cell research should be allowed today (73% in 2004).

While support for stem cell research has remained steady overall, the number of Republicans and born-again Christians opposing stem cell research has risen over the past year and fewer are uncertain about their position on the issue. Today, one in four (25%) Republicans, compared to one in five (18%) one a year ago, believe that stem cell research should not be allowed. The proportion of Republicans who are unsure has declined to 15 percent, down from 21 percent in 2004. Three in ten (29%) born-again Christians, compared to two in ten (21%) just one year ago, believe that stem cell research should not be allowed.

These are some of the results of a Harris Interactive online survey of 2,012 U.S. adults conducted between May 25 and 27, 2005 for The Wall Street Journal Online's Health Industry Edition.

Other key findings from the survey include:

- A majority (72%) of adults tend to agree that as long as the parents of the embryo give their permission, and the embryo would otherwise be destroyed, stem cell research should be allowed; this is unchanged from 2004.
- Nearly two-thirds (65%) of adults tend to agree that if most scientists believe that stem cell research will greatly increase our ability to prevent or treat serious diseases we should trust them and let them do it; this is virtually unchanged from 2004 (67%).
- More than half (54%) of adults tend to agree that if the federal government does not fund stem cell research from human embryos, the United States will fall behind other countries in terms of leadership in the development of new drugs and preventing diseases.
- Majorities of adults continue to reject two arguments used by those who oppose stem cell research. Two in three (66%) tend to disagree that allowing any medical research using stem cells from human embryos should be forbidden because it is unethical and immoral, and 58 percent tend to disagree that using cells from human embryos for research comes too close to allowing scientists to play God.
- More than one-quarter (27%) of adults tend not to believe that we should put the interests of medical science ahead of the preservation of human life, which includes human embryos.

Health-Care Poll

TABLE 1-A

Should Stem Cell Research Be Allowed—By Party ID

“Stem cells come from embryos left over from invitro fertilization, which are not used and normally destroyed. Many medical researchers want to use them to develop treatments, or to prevent diseases, such as diabetes, Alzheimer’s or Parkinson’s disease. On balance, do you think this research should or should not be allowed?”

Base: All Adults

	All Adults			Party Identification		
	2001	2004	2005	Republican	Democrat	Independent
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Should be allowed	61	73	74	60	83	79
Should not be allowed	21	11	14	25	7	11
Not sure/Refused	18	16	12	15	10	10

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

TABLE 1-B

Changes In Public Support For Stem Cell Research—By Party ID

“Stem cells come from embryos left over from invitro fertilization, which are not used and normally destroyed. Many medical researchers want to use them to develop treatments, or to prevent diseases, such as diabetes, Alzheimer’s or Parkinson’s disease. On balance, do you think this research should or should not be allowed?”

Base: All Adults

	Republican			Democrat			Independent		
	2004	2005	Change	2004	2005	Change	2004	2005	Change
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Should be allowed	60	60	-	80	83	+3	83	79	-4
Should not	18	25	+7	5	7	+2	7	11	+4
Not Sure/Refused	21	15	-6	15	10	-5	10	10	-

TABLE 2-A

Should Stem Cell Research Be Allowed—By Religious Affiliation

“Stem cells come from embryos left over from invitro fertilization, which are not used and normally destroyed. Many medical researchers want to use them to develop treatments, or to prevent diseases, such as diabetes, Alzheimer’s or Parkinson’s disease. On balance, do you think this research should or should not be allowed?”

Base: All Adults

	All Adults	Catholic	Protestant	Other Christian	Born-Again Christian	All Other (Not Born-Again Christians)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Should be allowed	74	70	79	67	53	78
Should not be allowed	14	15	13	18	29	11
Not sure/Refused	12	14	9	15	18	11

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

Health-Care Poll

TABLE 2-B

Changes In Public Support For Stem Cell Research—By Religious Affiliation

“Stem cells come from embryos left over from invitro fertilization, which are not used and normally destroyed. Many medical researchers want to use them to develop treatments, or to prevent diseases, such as diabetes, Alzheimer’s or Parkinson’s disease. On balance, do you think this research should or should not be allowed?”

Base: All Adults

	All Adults	Catholic	Protestant	Other Christian	Born-Again Christian	All Other (Not Born-Again Christians)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Should be allowed:						
2005	74	70	79	67	53	78
2004	73	67	77	66	58	75
Change	+1	+3	+2	+1	-5	+3
Should not:						
2005	14	15	13	18	29	11
2004	11	15	10	13	21	9
Change	+4	-	+3	+5	+8	+2
Not Sure/Refused:						
2005	12	14	9	15	18	11
2004	16	18	12	20	21	16
Change	-4	-4	-3	-5	-3	-5

TABLE 3-A

Agree/Disagree With Six Statements About Stem Cell Research

“Please indicate whether you tend to agree or disagree with the following statements.”

Base: All Adults

			Tend to Agree	Tend to Disagree	Not Sure/Refused
As long as the parents of the embryo give their permission, and the embryo would otherwise be destroyed, stem cell research should be allowed.	2001	%	72	21	7
	2004	%	72	13	15
	2005	%	72	15	13
If most scientists believe that stem cell research will greatly increase our ability to prevent or treat serious diseases we should trust them and let them do it.	2001	%	63	29	7
	2004	%	67	16	18
	2005	%	65	17	18
Using cells from human embryos for research comes too close to allowing scientists to play God.	2001	%	40	53	7
	2004	%	19	57	24
	2005	%	23	58	20
Allowing any medical research using stem cells from human embryos should be forbidden because it is unethical and immoral.	2001	%	32	60	8
	2004	%	15	63	22
	2005	%	17	66	17
If the federal government does not fund stem cell research from human embryos, the United States will fall behind other countries in terms of leadership in the development of new drugs and preventing diseases.	2005	%	54	25	21
I don't believe that we should put the interests of medical science ahead of the preservation of human life, which includes human embryos.	2005	%	27	48	24

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

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TABLE 3-B

Agree/Disagree With Six Statements About Stem Cell Research—By Party ID

“Please indicate whether you tend to agree or disagree with the following statements.”

Percent saying “Tend to Agree”

Base: All Adults

	Total	Party Identification		
		Republican	Democrat	Independent
	%	%	%	%
As long as the parents of the embryo give their permission, and the embryo would otherwise be destroyed, stem cell research should be allowed.	72	62	79	79
If most scientists believe that stem cell research will greatly increase our ability to prevent or treat serious diseases we should trust them and let them do it.	65	54	74	70
If the federal government does not fund stem cell research from human embryos, the United States will fall behind other countries in terms of leadership in the development of new drugs and preventing diseases.	54	41	65	60
I don't believe that we should put the interests of medical science ahead of the preservation of human life, which includes human embryos.	27	39	20	27
Using cells from human embryos for research comes too close to allowing scientists to play God.	23	34	17	20
Allowing any medical research using stem cells from human embryos should be forbidden because it is unethical and immoral.	17	30	9	14

Downloadable PDFs of Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Polls are posted at http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters_wsj.asp.

Health-Care Poll

Methodology

This poll was conducted online in the United States between May 25 and 27, 2005 among a nationwide cross section of 2,012 adults aged 18 and over. Figures for age, sex, 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.

In theory, with probability samples of this size, one could say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points of what they would be if the entire U.S. adult population had been polled with complete accuracy. Sampling error for the sub-samples of Republicans (646), Democrats (618), Independents (471), Catholics (389), Protestants (314), other Christians (810), born-again Christians (475), Christians who do not identify themselves as born-again (963) is higher and varies. Unfortunately, there are several other possible sources of error in polls or surveys that are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. This includes refusals to be interviewed (nonresponse), question wording and question order, and weighting. It is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors. This online sample was not a probability sample.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

About the Survey

The Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll is an exclusive poll that is published in the award-winning Health Industry Edition of The Wall Street Journal Online at www.wsj.com/health.

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Media inquiries, contact:

Kelly Gullo 585.214.7172

kgullo@harrisinteractive.com

Nancy Wong 585.214.7316

nwong@harrisinteractive.com

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