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### THE BEST MEDICINE IS TRUTH

**Fairleigh Dickinson University, July 31, 2018** – Not everyone believes reassuring claims about the safety of cellphones, fluoridated water, and vaccines. Skepticism also reigns when it comes to trusting the pharmaceutical industry to pursue drugs that cure rather than merely treat illness and disease. The Fairleigh Dickinson University Poll and the FDU School of Pharmacy and Health Sciences found widespread acceptance of some beliefs that call into question the trustworthiness of these and other public health claims.

The greatest distrust is reserved for the pharmaceutical industry. Two-thirds of adults nationwide (66%) believe drug makers intentionally hold back on the development of drugs that can cure illness and disease since the treatment of chronic diseases like diabetes are better for their profits (24%).

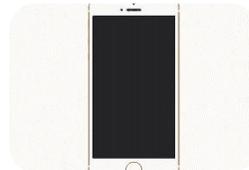
Fewer (43%) believe the addition of fluoride to drinking water is simply an expedient way for chemical companies to dump dangerous toxins into the environment. Almost an equal number (47%) believe that to be a false statement.



66%



47%



34%



16%

Around a third of Americans believe cellphones are dangerous to their users, but big corporations prevent public health officials from warning the public (34%). A majority (53%) are apparently not afraid of their phones and trust their devices.

Those who see a connection between vaccines and autism appear to be declining in number, as 16 percent believe a link exists, with 72 percent who reject such a claim. The poll has surveyed Americans in the past

about this claim, and found that as recently as [2016](#), five percent said a claim about a link between autism and vaccines was definitely true, with another 36 percent who responded that it is possibly true.

“A thread that links all of these claims about the use of things like fluoride, vaccines, cellphones, and treatment drugs is a protection of profits over the general welfare of the public,” said Krista Jenkins, director of the poll and a professor of political science at Fairleigh Dickinson University. “When you say you don’t believe the drug industry has your back, or that something as essential to modern life as a cellphone is also unsafe, you’re saying the powers that be value the almighty dollar over your health and wellness.”

The average number of so-called medical conspiracy beliefs across respondents is about two (1.6). Political perceptions of the polarizing president appear related to how people evaluate the alleged risk of vaccines and fluoridated water. Support for a belief in the connection between vaccines and fluoridated water grows stronger among Trump supporters, with 24 percent of those who favor the president also seeing a link between vaccines and autism, as compared with 11 percent with an unfavorable opinion of the president. About half (49 %) of Trump supporters think fluoride is dumped by chemical companies for reasons other than public health, as compared with 39 percent of those who don’t evaluate the president positively.

“Medical conspiracy theories partly stem from wide spread accessibility of misinformation by the public. Health care providers can play a vital role in educating the public about these matters. The decline in the number of people who believe vaccines cause autism is a testament to the success of counteracting misinformation with correct, well-studied facts,” said Dr. Elif Özdener, assistant professor of pharmacy practice at Fairleigh Dickinson University, School of Pharmacy and Health Sciences.

The same survey also finds striking differences among whites and non-whites, particularly in regard to cell phones and fluoridated water. Forty-three percent of people of color in the U.S. say they believe in the harmful effects of cellphones on one’s health, as compared with 29 percent of whites. And half of non-whites (52%) think fluoride is added to cover the addition of other toxins, as compared with 38 percent of whites.

Finally, the same survey asked Americans about the delicate balance between pharmaceutical regulations that protect public health and the complexities involved in developing new drugs. By a sizable margin, Americans recognize the importance of regulations, even if they tie up resources that could be used for developing other life saving and disease-curing drugs. Barely a fifth (21%) believe regulations get in the way of pharmaceutical advances, as compared with 68 percent who believe they are necessary for the protection of public health.

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**Methodology** - The Fairleigh Dickinson University Poll was conducted by landline and cellular telephone April 25 – May 1, 2018 using a random sample of adults nationwide aged 18 and older (N = 1001). Results have a margin of sampling error of +/- 3.9 percentage points, including the design effect.

Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers.

Interviews are conducted by Opinion America of Cedar Knolls, NJ, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a landline phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected.

The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, sex, and race. 432 interviews were conducted on landlines and 569 were conducted on cellular telephones.

The sample was purchased from Marketing Systems Group and the research was funded by Fairleigh Dickinson University.

*For the second time, the FDU poll received an “A” rating from statistician Nate Silver’s FiveThirtyEight blog. The ratings measure both accuracy and bias for all major polling services in the United States, providing an update to similar research the poll watchers conducted in 2014. FDU’s “A” rating puts it in the top 15 of the more than 380 polling institutes reviewed and graded from A+ through F. The FDU poll was found to have a 94 percent accuracy rate for predicting election results, and is one of only three A-rated polling institutes with zero bias to their rankings.*

## Questions

*I am going to read you a few statements. Please tell me if each statement is LARGELY TRUE or LARGELY FALSE.*

| <i>It has been proven that childhood vaccines cause autism</i> |            |      |        |       |           |           |         |              |         |       |     |       |       |       |     |
|--|------------|------|--------|-------|-----------|-----------|---------|--------------|---------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-----|
|  | Gender     |      |        | Race  |           | Education |         | Trump rating |         | Party |     |       | Age   |       |     |
|  | All        | Male | Female | White | Non-white | HS        | College | Favor        | Unfavor | Dem   | Ind | Repub | 18-34 | 35-54 | 55+ |
| True   | <b>16%</b> | 16   | 15     | 15    | 17        | 19        | 14      | 24           | 11      | 9     | 21  | 20    | 12    | 20    | 16  |
| False  | <b>72%</b> | 72   | 75     | 75    | 68        | 66        | 77      | 64           | 79      | 81    | 65  | 69    | 81    | 70    | 67  |
| Maybe (vol)  | <b>2%</b>  | 2    | 1      | 1     | 3         | 2         | 1       | 2            | 1       | 1     | 2   | 1     | 1     | 1     | 2   |
| DK (vol)   | <b>10%</b> | 11   | 9      | 9     | 12        | 13        | 8       | 10           | 9       | 9     | 12  | 11    | 5     | 10    | 14  |
| Refused (vol)  | <b>0</b>   | 0    | 0      | 0     | 0         | 0         | 0       | 0            | 0       | 0     | 0   | 0     | 0     | 0     | 1   |

| <i>Health officials know that cellphones cause cancer but won't acknowledge this because large corporations won't let them</i> |            |      |        |       |           |           |         |              |         |       |     |       |       |       |     |
|--|------------|------|--------|-------|-----------|-----------|---------|--------------|---------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-----|
|  | Gender     |      |        | Race  |           | Education |         | Trump rating |         | Party |     |       | Age   |       |     |
|  | All        | Male | Female | White | Non-white | HS        | College | Favor        | Unfavor | Dem   | Ind | Repub | 18-34 | 35-54 | 55+ |
| True   | <b>34%</b> | 28   | 43     | 29    | 43        | 43        | 26      | 38           | 32      | 33    | 33  | 36    | 33    | 33    | 35  |
| False  | <b>53%</b> | 59   | 45     | 58    | 45        | 44        | 61      | 52           | 55      | 56    | 52  | 51    | 59    | 53    | 50  |
| Maybe (vol)  | <b>3%</b>  | 3    | 3      | 3     | 3         | 3         | 3       | 2            | 3       | 2     | 3   | 3     | 2     | 4     | 3   |
| DK (vol)   | <b>10%</b> | 9    | 9      | 10    | 9         | 10        | 10      | 8            | 10      | 9     | 11  | 9     | 6     | 10    | 12  |
| Ref (vol)  | <b>0</b>   | 0    | 0      | 0     | 0         | 0         | 1       | 0            | 1       | 1     | 0   | 0     | 0     | 0     | 1   |

| <i>The addition of fluoride to tap water has allowed chemical companies to dump dangerous chemicals into the environment</i> |            |      |        |       |           |           |         |              |         |       |     |       |       |       |     |
|--|------------|------|--------|-------|-----------|-----------|---------|--------------|---------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-----|
|  | Gender     |      |        | Race  |           | Education |         | Trump rating |         | Party |     |       | Age   |       |     |
|  | All        | Male | Female | White | Non-white | HS        | College | Favor        | Unfavor | Dem   | Ind | Repub | 18-34 | 35-54 | 55+ |
| True   | <b>43%</b> | 38   | 48     | 38    | 52        | 55        | 33      | 49           | 39      | 39    | 49  | 43    | 42    | 43    | 42  |
| False  | <b>47%</b> | 52   | 42     | 50    | 42        | 36        | 57      | 43           | 51      | 53    | 41  | 46    | 46    | 49    | 46  |
| Maybe (vol)  | <b>2%</b>  | 1    | 2      | 1     | 3         | 2         | 2       | 0            | 2       | 2     | 2   | 1     | 4     | 0     | 2   |
| DK (vol)   | <b>8%</b>  | 8    | 8      | 11    | 3         | 8         | 9       | 8            | 8       | 6     | 9   | 10    | 7     | 8     | 10  |
| Ref (vol)  | <b>0</b>   | 0    | 0      | 0     | 0         | 0         | 0       | 0            | 0       | 0     | 0   | 0     | 0     | 0     | 1   |

| <i>Pharmaceutical companies spend less money on developing drugs that cure diseases like cancer and diabetes because there is more money to be made by selling drugs that treat rather than cure diseases</i> |        |      |        |       |           |           |         |              |         |       |     |       |       |       |     |
|---|--------|------|--------|-------|-----------|-----------|---------|--------------|---------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-----|
|   | Gender |      |        | Race  |           | Education |         | Trump rating |         | Party |     |       | Age   |       |     |
|   | All    | Male | Female | White | Non-white | HS        | College | Favor        | Unfavor | Dem   | Ind | Repub | 18-34 | 35-54 | 55+ |

|             |            |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|-------------|------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| True        | <b>66%</b> | 64 | 68 | 63 | 70 | 77 | 56 | 70 | 63 | 63 | 67 | 68 | 72 | 64 | 64 |
| False       | <b>24%</b> | 26 | 23 | 27 | 20 | 15 | 33 | 23 | 26 | 28 | 23 | 24 | 21 | 26 | 26 |
| Maybe (vol) | <b>3%</b>  | 3  | 3  | 2  | 4  | 2  | 3  | 3  | 3  | 3  | 3  | 1  | 1  | 2  | 3  |
| DK (vol)    | <b>7%</b>  | 7  | 7  | 7  | 5  | 6  | 8  | 4  | 7  | 6  | 7  | 6  | 6  | 8  | 6  |
| Ref (vol)   | <b>1%</b>  | 0  | 1  | 1  | 0  | 0  | 1  | 0  | 1  | 1  | 0  | 0  | 1  | 0  | 1  |

| <i>Medical conspiracies beliefs</i> |            |      |        |       |           |           |         |              |         |       |     |       |       |       |     |
|-------------------------------------|------------|------|--------|-------|-----------|-----------|---------|--------------|---------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-----|
|                                     | Gender     |      |        | Race  |           | Education |         | Trump rating |         | Party |     |       | Age   |       |     |
|                                     | All        | Male | Female | White | Non-white | HS        | College | Favor        | Unfavor | Dem   | Ind | Repub | 18-34 | 35-54 | 55+ |
| Average                             | <b>1.6</b> | 1.5  | 1.7    | 1.5   | 1.8       | 1.9       | 1.3     | 1.8          | 1.4     | 1.5   | 1.7 | 1.7   | 1.6   | 1.6   | 1.6 |

| Number of medical conspiracy beliefs – all |     |
|--|-----|
| 0  | 23% |
| 1  | 30% |
| 2  | 20% |
| 3  | 20% |
| 4  | 7%  |

| <i>Some people believe drug companies would provide more cures if there were fewer regulations that require them to spend money and time ensuring a drug's safety and effectiveness. Others think that such regulations are needed to protect people from new drugs that might work or even end up hurting people. What about you? [rotate options]</i> |            |      |        |       |           |           |         |       |         |       |     |       |       |       |     |
|---|------------|------|--------|-------|-----------|-----------|---------|-------|---------|-------|-----|-------|-------|-------|-----|
|   | Gender     |      |        | Race  |           | Education |         | Trump |         | Party |     |       | Age   |       |     |
|   | All        | Male | Female | White | Non-white | HS        | College | Favor | Unfavor | Dem   | Ind | Repub | 18-34 | 35-54 | 55+ |
| Regulations get in the way  | <b>21%</b> | 25   | 18     | 24    | 17        | 22        | 20      | 31    | 15      | 10    | 22  | 31    | 20    | 21    | 24  |
| Regulations are needed  | <b>68%</b> | 67   | 69     | 66    | 72        | 66        | 70      | 60    | 74      | 79    | 69  | 59    | 72    | 69    | 64  |
| DK (vol)  | <b>9%</b>  | 7    | 11     | 8     | 11        | 10        | 8       | 9     | 10      | 9     | 8   | 9     | 8     | 9     | 10  |
| Ref (vol)   | <b>2%</b>  | 2    | 2      | 2     | 1         | 2         | 2       | 1     | 2       | 2     | 1   | 2     | 1     | 2     | 2   |

**Exact question wording and order**

N1 through N12 withheld for forthcoming release

*MC1 Some people believe drug companies would provide more cures if there were fewer regulations that require them to spend money and time ensuring a drug's safety and effectiveness. Others think that such regulations are needed to protect people from new drugs that might work or even end up hurting people. What about you? [rotate options]*

- 1 Regulations get in the way of cures
- 2 Regulations are needed
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

*MC2 I'm going to read you a few statements. Please tell me if each statement is LARGELY TRUE OR LARGELY FALSE:*

- 1 True
- 2 False
- 3 Maybe (vol)
- 8 DK (vol)

[Rotate MC2 series]

*MC2A It has been proven that childhood vaccines cause autism*

*MC2B Health officials know that cellphones cause cancer but won't acknowledge this because large corporations won't let them.*

*MC2C The addition of fluoride to tap water has allowed chemical companies to dump dangerous chemicals into the environment.*

*MC2D Pharmaceutical companies spend less money on developing drugs that cure diseases like cancer and diabetes because there is more money to be made by selling drugs that **treat** rather than **cure** diseases.*

**Sample characteristics**

|                           |     |
|---------------------------|-----|
| Male                      | 49% |
| Female                    | 51% |
| Democrat (with leaners)   | 47% |
| Republican (with leaners) | 35% |
| Independent               | 15% |
| 18-34                     | 10% |
| 35-59                     | 51% |
| 60+                       | 39% |
| White                     | 73% |
| African-American          | 12% |
| Latino                    | 10% |
| Asian                     | 2%  |
| Other/refused             | 3%  |