

Is Your Tween Prepared To Stay Home Alone This Summer?

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Whether it be for two hours or an entire day, millions of tweens children ages 11 to 13 will be left home alone this summer, despite their parents' concerns that they may not have the knowledge and skills they need to stay safe at home.

According to a report released today by the University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, many parents worry that their at-home tweens do not know how to safely use kitchen appliances, where to go to stay safe during a severe storm, or that they should not give out personal information online or over the phone. Yet, one in five parents polled say that they have left tweens home alone for an entire day.

"There is no magic age at which a child can be left home alone. It typically depends on a parent's judgment about how mature that child is, and how ready they are to take on the responsibility of being home alone," says Matthew M. Davis, M.D., M.A.P.P., director of the National Poll on Children's Health. "Regardless, when parents decide to leave their children home alone, there are several common at-home safety concerns they need to consider and address with kids ahead of time."

Parents who generally are more confident in their children's safety skills are more likely to leave them at home for more than an hour, finds the National Poll on Children's Health. Still, more than 25 percent of parents polled reveal that they had not talked a lot with their tweens about neighborhood, Internet or home safety before leaving them home alone.

The National Poll on Children's Health finds:

- Nearly two-thirds of parents left tweens home alone for one to two hours.
- One out of five parents have left tweens home alone for an entire day.
- Parents have more confidence in their tweens ability to follow guidelines for gun and fire safety than for Internet or storm safety.
- 28 percent of parents whose tweens stay home alone lack confidence that their children would not give out personal information via the Internet. Similarly, 30 percent of parents lack confidence that their child would not give out personal information over the phone.

Before making the decision to leave children home alone, Davis recommends that parents review and discuss common safety questions and situations with tweens.

"We were surprised to find the proportion of parents who are not very confident their children will follow safety guidelines, even though they are having their tweens stay home alone," says Davis, associate professor of general pediatrics and internal medicine at the U-M Medical School, and associate professor of public policy at the U-M Gerald R. Ford School of Public Health. "This suggests that more parents need to have conversations with their kids about safety before they leave them home alone."

Online resources for parents about leaving kids home alone:

- Child Care Aware: Is your child ready to stay at home? <http://www.childcareaware.org/en/subscriptions/dailyparent/volume.php?id=9>

- UMHS Your Child: Internet safety <http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/internet.htm>
- UMHS Your Child: Guns and kids <http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/guns.htm>
- Department of Homeland Security Ready America: Storm preparedness <http://www.ready.gov/america/beinformed/thunderstorms.html>
- National Fire Protection Association: <http://www.nfpa.org>

For its report, the National Poll on Children's Health used data from a national online survey conducted in April 2008 in collaboration with Knowledge Networks Inc. The survey was administered to a random sample of 2,064 adults, ages 18 and older, who are a part of Knowledge Network's online KnowledgePanelSM. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect U.S. population figures from the U.S. Census Bureau. About three-fourths of the sample were households with children.

For the complete report and podcast about poll results, visit the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health online at <http://www.med.umich.edu/mott/research/chearnpch.html>.

The C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health funded by the Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases and part of the CHEAR Unit at the U-M Health System is designed to measure major health care issues and trends for U.S. children.

To learn more about Knowledge Networks, visit <http://www.knowledgenetworks.com>.

University of Michigan Health System
2901 Hubbard St., Ste. 2400
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2435
United States
<http://www.med.umich.edu>

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