

# TV Drama/Comedy Viewers and Health Information 2005 Porter Novelli HealthStyles Survey

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

Analysis of the 2005 Porter Novelli HealthStyles database was conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Hollywood, Health & Society at the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center. The dataset consists of responses from ten items that describe the characteristics of daytime and/or primetime TV drama/comedy viewers, and the effects of health content from TV storylines on their learning about health and actions taken.

The Porter Novelli HealthStyles survey is one of a pair of linked postal mail surveys sent to a sample of adults age 18 and older, which is drawn to be nationally representative on seven U.S. Census Bureau demographic characteristics. The first survey is a consumer survey in which data on general media habits, product use, interests, and lifestyle are collected. The second survey, HealthStyles, is administered to respondents to the first survey in which data on health attitudes, behaviors, conditions, and information seeking are collected. HealthStyles is a proprietary database product developed by Porter Novelli, a social marketing and public relations firm. The survey was conducted in July and August of 2005 with 3,479 respondents.

### Key Findings

More than eight out of ten (83%) respondents report watching **daytime and/or primetime dramas/comedies** (hereafter referred to as “**TV dramas/comedies**”) at least a few times a month and nearly two thirds (64%) are *regular viewers* who watch two or more times a week.

- Almost one-third (32%) of all respondents report watching **daytime dramas** at least a few times a month and about one-fifth (21%) are *regular viewers* who watch two or more times a week.
- More than eight out of ten (83%) of all respondents report watching **primetime dramas** at least a few times a month, and more than six out of ten (62%) are *regular viewers* who watch two or more times a week.
- Those with lower income and less education report watching **daytime dramas** more often than other groups.
- Women, Blacks and young adults (ages 18-34) consistently report watching **TV dramas/comedies** more often than other groups.

### Learning

About two out of three (67%) *regular daytime drama viewers* report learning something new about a health issue or disease from a TV show in the past six months.

- Men and women report learning at the same rate (67%).
- Minorities report learning more often than whites: Hispanics (77%) and Blacks (75%) vs. Whites (63%).
- Hispanic men and women (77%) and Black women (76%) report the highest rates of learning.

Almost six out of ten (58%) *regular primetime drama/comedy viewers* report learning something new about a health issue or disease from a TV show in the past six months.

- Women (62%) report learning more often than men (53%).
- Minorities report learning more often than Whites: Blacks (72%) and Hispanics (62%) vs. Whites (55%).
- Black women (74%) and Black men (69%) report the highest rates of learning.

### **Actions Taken**

More than one-third (34%) of *regular daytime drama viewers* report taking action after hearing about a health issue or disease on a daytime drama, with men and women reporting at about the same rate (36% vs. 34%).

- Hispanics (43%) and Blacks (37%) report taking action more often than Whites (32%).
- Hispanic women (50%) report taking action more often than both Black (36%) and White women (30%).
- Black men (39%) report taking action more often than both White (36%) and Hispanic men (34%).

Nearly three out of ten (28%) *regular primetime drama/comedy viewers* report taking one or more actions after hearing about a health issue or disease in a primetime drama or comedy, with women reporting more actions than men (33% vs. 23%).

- Blacks (34%) and Hispanics (31%) report taking action more often than Whites (27%).
- Hispanic (37%) and Black women (36%) report taking action more often than White women (32%).
- Black men (29%) report taking action more often than both Hispanic (25%) and White men (23%).

### **Heard About**

Nearly one out of ten respondents (8%) report hearing about a health issue or disease in a **TV drama/comedy** from someone else in the past six months.

- Women (10%) and men (7%) report hearing about TV health storylines at about the same rate.
- Blacks (12%) report hearing about TV health storylines more often than both Hispanics (8%) and Whites (8%).

## Implications

The HealthStyles findings suggest TV dramas/comedies serve a critical health education function when they provide accurate, timely information about disease, injury and disability in storylines for the vast majority of U.S. residents who watch at least a few times a month, and especially for 64% of the population (193.6 million people based on 2007 U.S. Census Bureau data) who are regular viewers watching two or more times a week. Since 1999, minority viewers who respond to the HealthStyles survey report more often than Whites that they learn something new about a health issue or disease from TV shows, and that they take some type of action, such as talking to others about the health topic or doing something themselves to prevent the problem. Audience reach for TV dramas/comedies is broad, due to the mass media audience, and viewing hours are highest among minority groups (Nielsen Media Research, 2007) who share a disproportionate burden of disease, injury and disability. TV dramas/comedies provide a critical channel for communicating prevention and treatment information to audiences. When even a small percentage of viewers take action as the result of a TV storyline, to protect or improve their own health or the health of someone they know, millions of people and families can benefit. If a show fails to convey accurate information, or portrays risky behavior without the associated health consequences, viewers may suffer negative effects as well.

The daily and weekly formats of TV dramas/comedies can be very influential since audiences develop familiarity with regular characters and identify with characters they perceive to be like themselves. Behavioral scientists have demonstrated that this type of identification, or parasocial interaction, enhances learning and prevention. Audience members are inclined to model desirable behavior and avoid undesirable behavior, based on the experiences of the characters they have come to know. Letters and emails to the shows provide anecdotal evidence about the effects TV entertainment have on their audiences. Correspondence from viewers offers further evidence of effects, including thanks for important health information, reports of calls and visits to doctors, advice given to friends and encouragement for producers to keep up the good work. As writers and producers portray health issues accurately, they help define modern-day television as a source of entertainment and education. Audiences benefit from new health knowledge, positive attitudes about healthy lifestyle habits, and behavior change that contributes to a healthier and safer life.

Public health and safety issues that writers and producers of TV storylines may consider for story ideas and script development include:

- Topics that impact many people at all life stages (e.g. adolescents/risky behaviors such as smoking and suicide; women/heart disease; children/obesity; and older adults/influenza).
- Prevention information delivered or modeled by credible characters (e.g. getting a mammogram, using infant and child safety seats, taking a daily vitamin, getting a flu vaccine, and exercising).
- Storylines involving multiple episodes that explore the impact of disease, injury and disability on people's lives (e.g. following the course of a character's battle with cancer from discovery of the disease through treatment and subsequent remission or demise).

- Characters with negative beliefs and poor health practices suffering the consequences (e.g. a character with unprotected sex becoming infected with HIV).
- Challenges and struggles these characters face in changing behaviors, and the positive outcomes that result when they choose more positive beliefs and practices (e.g. having a healthy diet and regular physical activity to reduce risk of obesity, heart disease and diabetes).
- Storylines with characters who have health limitations or impairment, but practice healthy behaviors that contribute to their improved quality of life (e.g. a character with diabetes eats healthy foods, takes medications regularly and refrains from drinking alcohol).

## **Summary of Findings**

(Sample Size: 3,479 Respondents)

### **Frequency of TV Viewing**

More than eight out of ten (83%) respondents report watching **TV dramas/comedies** at least a few times a month.

- More than three out of five (64%) are *regular viewers* who report watching two or more times a week.
- Nearly two-thirds (65%) of *regular viewers* (41% of all respondents) report watching more than 3 times a week.
- Women, Blacks and young adults (ages 18-34) consistently report watching TV dramas/comedies more often than other groups.

Almost one-third (32%) of all respondents report watching **daytime dramas** (like *The Bold and the Beautiful*, *General Hospital*, or *Days of Our Lives*) at least a few times a month.

- About one-fifth (21%) are *regular viewers* who report watching two or more times a week.
- Almost three-quarters (73%) of *regular viewers* (15% of all respondents) report watching more than 3 times a week.
- More female than male *regular viewers* report watching daytime dramas (28% vs. 14%).
- Those with lower income and less education report watching daytime dramas more often than other groups.

More than eight out of ten (83%) of all respondents report watching **primetime dramas/comedies** (like *Grey's Anatomy*, *CSI*, or *The Simpsons*) at least a few times a month.

- More than six out of ten (62%) are *regular viewers* who report watching two or more times a week.
- More than six out of ten (61%) *regular viewers* (38% of all respondents) report watching more than 3 times a week.

- More female than male regular viewers report watching primetime dramas/comedies (66% vs. 57%).

Table 1. Frequency of Regular TV Viewing by Audiences

	Demographic Characteristics	Daytime	Sample size	Primetime	Sample size
Race/Ethnicity	White	19%	459	63%	1502
	Black	36%	141	65%	245
	Hispanic	19%	75	61%	246
Gender	Males	14%	221	57%	939
	Females	28%	481	66%	1145
Age	18-24	21%	92	67%	298
	25-34	23%	145	69%	440
	35-44	17%	122	61%	429
	45-54	19%	118	61%	388
	55-64	23%	98	59%	255
	65+	24%	127	53%	275
Income	Under \$15K	36%	169	62%	286
	\$15K to \$24.9K	28%	123	65%	287
	\$25K to \$39.9K	20%	124	62%	377
	\$40K to \$59.9K	19%	118	61%	382
	\$60K+	14%	168	61%	752
Education	Some Elementary School	43%	6	69%	9
	Elementary School Graduate	29%	7	71%	15
	Some High School/Trade School	36%	61	53%	86
	High School/Trade School Graduate	30%	241	66%	528
	Some College	21%	246	64%	734
	College Graduate	14%	84	63%	379
	Graduate School	10%	41	55%	221

### **Learning From TV Health Storylines**

About two out of three (67%) *regular daytime drama viewers* report learning something new about a health issue or disease from a daytime drama in the past six months. Men and women report learning at the same rate and minorities (Blacks and Hispanics) report learning about health from daytime dramas more often than Whites:

- 67% of women and 67% of men
- 77% of Hispanics and 75% of Blacks vs. 63% of Whites
- 76% of Black women vs. 70% of Black men
- 77% of Hispanic women and 77% of Hispanic men
- 62% of White women vs. 65% of White men

Almost six out of ten (58%) *regular primetime drama/comedy viewers* report learning something new about a health issue or disease from a primetime drama/comedy in the past six months. Women report learning more often than men, minorities (Blacks and Hispanics) report learning more often than Whites, and Blacks report learning more often than other groups:

- 62% of women vs. 53% of men
- 72% of Blacks vs. 62% of Hispanics vs. 55% of Whites
- 74% of Black women vs. 69% of Black men
- 62% of Hispanic women vs. 63% of Hispanic men
- 60% of White women vs. 50% of White men

### **Actions Taken From TV Health Storylines**

More than one-third (34%) of *regular daytime drama viewers* and nearly three out of ten (28%) *regular primetime drama/comedy viewers* report taking at least one action after hearing about a health issue or disease on a TV drama/comedy.

- Of *regular daytime drama viewers*, men and women report taking action at about the same rate (36% vs. 34%).
- Of *regular primetime drama/comedy viewers*, women report taking action more often than men (33% vs. 23%).

Table 2. Actions Taken By Regular Daytime and Primetime TV Viewers by Gender

	Daytime			Primetime		
	All	Females	Males	All	Females	Males
Took at least one action	34%	34%	36%	28%	33%	23%
Told someone about the story or health topic	29%	29%	29%	26%	30%	20%
Told someone to do something or did something myself	10%	9%	11%	6%	7%	6%
Visited a clinic, doctor, or nurse	4%	3%	5%	2%	2%	2%
Called a clinic, health care place, or hotline number	4%	4%	5%	2%	3%	2%

Among *regular daytime drama viewers*, Hispanics (43%) and Blacks (37%) report taking action more often than Whites (32%).

- Hispanic women (50%) report taking action more often than Black (36%) or White women (30%).
- Black men (39%) report taking action more often than White (36%) or Hispanic men (34%).
- Except for Hispanic males, minorities report action more often than Whites.

Table 3. Actions Taken by Regular Daytime Drama TV Viewers by Gender and Race

	Females				Males			
	All	White	Black	Hispanic	All	White	Black	Hispanic
Took at least one action	34%	30%	36%	50%	36%	36%	39%	34%
Told someone about the story or health topic	29%	26%	31%	44%	29%	28%	35%	32%
Told someone to do something or did something myself	9%	8%	9%	14%	11%	9%	13%	19%
Visited a clinic, doctor, or nurse	3%	1%	5%	12%	5%	4%	8%	6%
Called a clinic, health care place, or hotline number	4%	2%	7%	12%	5%	3%	13%	6%

Among *regular primetime drama/comedy viewers*, Blacks (34%) and Hispanics (31%) report taking action more often than Whites (27%).

- Hispanic (37%) and Black women (36%) report taking action more often than White women (32%).
- Black men (29%) report taking action more often than both Hispanic (25%) and White men (23%).
- Minorities (Blacks and Hispanics) report action more often than Whites.

Table 4. Actions Taken by Regular Primetime Drama/Comedy TV Viewers by Gender and Race

	Females				Males			
	All	White	Black	Hispanic	All	White	Black	Hispanic
Took at least one action	33%	32%	36%	37%	23%	23%	29%	25%
Told someone about the story or health topic	30%	29%	33%	33%	20%	19%	26%	24%
Told someone to do something or did something myself	7%	6%	9%	8%	6%	6%	7%	8%
Visited a clinic, doctor, or nurse	2%	1%	4%	7%	2%	1%	9%	2%
Called a clinic, health care place, or hotline number	3%	2%	5%	5%	2%	1%	4%	3%

### **Hearing About TV Health Storylines**

Among all respondents, nearly one out of ten (8%) reports hearing about a TV health storyline in a **TV drama/comedy** from someone else in the past six months.

- Women (10%) report hearing about a TV health storyline more often than men (7%).

- Blacks (12%) report hearing about a TV health storyline more often than both Hispanics (8%) and Whites (8%).

More than one out of ten (11%) *regular daytime drama viewers* report hearing about a TV health storyline in a TV drama/comedy from someone else in the past six months.

- Women (12%) and men (10%) report hearing about a TV health storyline at about the same rate.
- Hispanics (19%) and Blacks (16%) report hearing about a TV health storyline more often than Whites (8%).

One out of ten (10%) *regular primetime drama/comedy viewers* reports hearing about a TV health storyline from someone else in the past six months.

- Women (11%) and men (9%) report hearing about TV health storylines at about the same rate.
- Blacks (14%) report hearing about TV health storylines than both Hispanics (11%) and Whites (10%).

### HealthStyles Surveys: TV Viewers 1999- 2005

Changes in Porter Novelli HealthStyles survey findings for *regular TV viewers* were analyzed during four of the past six years, to determine trends in TV viewing, learning about health from TV shows and actions taken as a result. Analyses included data from 1999 (*regular daytime drama viewers*), 2000 (*regular primetime drama viewers*), 2001 (*regular daytime and primetime drama viewers*) and 2005 (*regular daytime and primetime drama/comedy viewers*). Prior to 2005, respondents were asked about learning and actions taken *within the past year*. In 2005, the time frame was the *past six months*. In addition, 2000 and 2001 primetime data were collected on *primetime dramas only*, while 2005 primetime data included *comedies*. While comparisons are limited by these differences, the addition of comedies to the 2005 primetime survey items allows for a more accurate assessment of regular primetime viewers, especially minority viewers for whom comedies rank highest in the TV ratings (Nielsen Media Research, 2007).

Respondents who report watching **daytime and primetime TV shows** a few times a month increased from 74% in 2001 to 83% in 2005. This increase may be due in part to the inclusion of primetime comedies in the 2005 survey.

- *Regular daytime and primetime TV viewers* increased from 43% in 2001 to 64% in 2005, which is likely due to adding primetime comedies to the 2005 survey.
- *Regular daytime drama TV viewers* stayed about the same, from 19% in 1999, to 21% in 2001, to 21% in 2005.
- *Regular primetime drama TV viewers* increased from 50% in 2000, to 62% in 2005, which is likely due the addition of comedies in 2005.

Note: The decline in regular primetime viewers to 38% in 2001 may be due to a heavy menu of widely-popular reality TV shows in 2001.

## Learning About Health From TV Storylines

- *Regular daytime drama* female viewers who report learning about health from TV storylines increased from 1999 to 2005 (53% to 67%), with Blacks and Hispanics reporting more often than Whites, except for 2001 when Hispanics report most often.
- *Regular primetime drama* (and comedies for 2005) female viewers who report learning about health from TV storylines increased from 2000 to 2005 (51% to 62%) with Hispanic women having the greatest overall increase.

Table 5. Learning Among Regular Daytime or Primetime Drama Female TV Viewers by Year and Race

TV drama helped respondent learn something new about a health issue or disease				
	1999	2000	2001	2005
<b>Daytime</b>				
All	53%	--	66%	67%
White	48%	--	65%	62%
Black	69%	--	65%	76%
Hispanic	56%	--	74%	77%
<b>Primetime</b>				
All	--	51%	63%	62%
White	--	49%	61%	60%
Black	--	63%	68%	74%
Hispanic	--	46%	74%	62%

Note: The survey item asked about learning “over the past year” for 1999-2001 and “over the past 6 months” for 2005. Primetime “comedies” were added to the survey item in 2005.

## Actions Taken From TV Health Storylines

*Regular daytime and primetime TV viewers* who report taking action after hearing about a health issue or disease in a TV drama decreased modestly from 2001 to 2005 (34% to 28%). This decrease may be due in part to the addition of comedies in the 2005 survey, since comedies generally have less health content and therefore provide less motivation for viewers to take action. It may also be due in part to the shorter time frame of six months in 2005, compared to a full year in 2001.

Table 6. Actions Taken Among Regular Primetime and Daytime TV Viewers by Year, Gender, and Race

Took at least one action after hearing something about a health issue or disease on a TV drama		
	2001	2005
Females: All	37%	33%
White	36%	31%
Black	41%	35%
Hispanic	41%	37%
Males: All	29%	23%

White	27%	23%
Black	36%	28%
Hispanic	39%	24%

Note: The survey item asked about action “over the past year” for 2001 and “over the past 6 months” for 2005. Primetime “comedies” were added to the survey item in 2005.

*Regular daytime* female viewers who report telling someone about a TV health topic stayed about the same from 1999 to 2005. *Regular primetime* female viewers who report telling someone about a TV health topic decreased across all groups from 1999 to 2005. Again, this decrease may be due in part to the addition of comedies in the 2005 survey items and the shorter time frame of six months, compared to one year in 2000.

Table 6a. Actions Taken Among Regular Daytime and Primetime Female TV Viewers by Year and Race

Told someone about the story or health topic				
	1999	2000	2001	2005
<b>Daytime</b>				
All	29%	--	32%	29%
White	26%	--	31%	26%
Black	38%	--	34%	31%
Hispanic	31%	--	35%	44%
<b>Primetime</b>				
All	--	48%	35%	30%
White	--	48%	35%	29%
Black	--	57%	32%	33%
Hispanic	--	46%	41%	33%

Note: The survey item asked about action “over the past year” for 2001 and “over the past 6 months” for 2005. Primetime “comedies” were added to the survey item in 2005.

## References

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