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## **MOST NOT GETTING H1N1 VACCINE, DIVIDED ABOUT HEALTH REFORM**

*Thoughts of handguns in parks and bars shot down, Obama approval declines*

**MURFREESBORO**, Tenn. – Most Tennesseans have no plans to take the swine flu vaccine being unpacked across the state this week, the latest MTSU Poll finds.

Other findings show state residents concerned but divided about health reform; opposed to carrying handguns in parks, restaurants and bars; more negative toward President Obama than they were in the spring; indifferent about which party controls state government, and faintly hopeful of an economic recovery.

Asked whether they personally plan to get inoculated against swine flu, 38 percent of Tennesseans – about two in five – answer yes. A 52 percent majority say they do not plan to be inoculated, and the rest aren't sure or decline to answer.

“Polls around the country are registering concern about the vaccine, even though experts say it is perfectly safe,” said Dr. Ken Blake, associate professor of journalism at MTSU and director of the poll. “Those concerns have shown up in our poll, too.”

The poll also shows that only about half of Tennesseans think the government will be able to ward off a nationwide swine flu epidemic.

“Tennesseans may be leery of the vaccine, but they do seem concerned about the possibility of a major outbreak,” Blake said. “That suggests the situation could change rapidly. If, for example, swine flu cases spike upward or appear increasingly dangerous, demand for the vaccine could rise.”

Meanwhile, as the clearest-yet outlines of health reform legislation emerge in Congress, Tennesseans agree on little about the issue other than its importance. While about two-thirds of state residents consider health reform either very or extremely important, only 36 percent generally support the proposals that have been discussed in Congress so far, 46 percent oppose them, and a sizable 17 percent are unsure.

“And, as in Washington, attitudes here in Tennessee toward health reform divide sharply along party lines, with Republicans generally opposed, Democrats generally supportive, and independents wavering in the middle and often saying they just don't know,” Blake said.

The poll also finds that majorities of Tennesseans oppose letting handgun carry permit holders take their weapons into public parks, restaurants and especially bars. Fifty-four percent of state residents oppose allowing permit holders to carry handguns in parks; 60 percent, in restaurants; and 80 percent, in bars.

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“Opposition to lawfully carrying handguns in bars is especially high, not only among all Tennesseans but also in households that include a handgun owner and even in households that include a handgun carry permit holder,” said Dr. Jason Reineke, assistant professor of journalism and associate director of the poll.

The poll found that only about a quarter of those who have a handgun in their household favor allowing handguns to be carried in bars, Reineke said. And the percentage is about the same among those from households in which at least one person has a state handgun carry permit, he said.

Other findings include a decline since spring in President Obama’s approval rating among Tennesseans. Only 46 percent of Tennesseans currently approve of the way President Barack Obama is handling his job, with 48 percent saying that they disapprove. In this past spring’s poll, 53 percent of Tennesseans approved of Obama, and only 27 percent disapproved.

Also, Tennesseans seem largely indifferent to the drama Monday’s special election produced over which party will gain the upper hand in Tennessee’s state House of Representatives. Asked which party should control the Legislature, 31 percent say the Democrats, 33 percent say the Republicans, and 35 percent say they don’t know.

Indecision is even higher regarding the governor’s race, despite the candidates already campaigning to replace Democratic Gov. Phil Bredesen. Twenty-five percent say they want a Democratic governor, but another 22 percent want a Republican governor, and a 51 percent majority say they have no preference right now. The rest give no answer.

Finally, 71 percent of Tennesseans say that the recession has hurt them financially, up from spring’s 66 percent. But worry about the future economy has decreased to 33 percent from spring’s 43 percent. These and other economic indicators in the poll suggest a cautious optimism among Tennesseans that the recession is abating.

Conducted by Middle Tennessee State University’s College of Mass Communication, the telephone poll of 716 randomly selected Tennessee adults has an error margin of plus or minus four percentage points at the 95 percent level of confidence. Theoretically, this means that a sample of this size should produce a statistical portrait of the population within four percentage points 95 out of 100 times. The Survey Group at MTSU provides independent, non-partisan and unbiased public opinion data regarding major social, political and ethical issues affecting Tennessee. The poll began in 1998 as a measure of public opinion in the 39 counties comprising Middle Tennessee and began measuring public opinion statewide in 2001. Learn more and view the full report on the poll’s website, [www.mtsusurveygroup.org](http://www.mtsusurveygroup.org).

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**NOTE:**

[Click here](#) to view **Fall 2009 poll results and to search past poll reports.**

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