

American adults flunk basic science

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Are Americans flunking science? A new national survey commissioned by the California Academy of Sciences and conducted by Harris Interactive reveals that the U.S. public is unable to pass even a basic scientific literacy test.

Over the past few months, the American government has allocated hundreds of billions of dollars for economic bailout plans. While this spending may provide a short-term solution to the country's economic woes, most analysts agree that the long-term solution must include a transition to a more knowledge-based economy, including a focus on science, which is now widely recognized as a major driver of innovation and industry. Despite its importance to economic growth, environmental protection, and global health and energy issues, scientific literacy is currently low among American [adults](#). According to the national survey commissioned by the California Academy of Sciences:

- Only 53% of adults know how long it takes for the Earth to revolve around the Sun.
- Only 59% of adults know that the earliest humans and dinosaurs did not live at the same time.
- Only 47% of adults can roughly approximate the percent of the Earth's surface that is covered with water .
- Only 21% of adults answered all three questions correctly.

Knowledge about some key scientific issues is also low. Despite the fact that access to fresh water is likely to be one of the most pressing environmental issues over the coming years, less than 1% of U.S. adults

know what percent of the planet's water is fresh (the correct answer is 3%). Nearly half didn't even hazard a guess. Additionally, 40% of U.S. adults say they are "not at all knowledgeable" about sustainability.

Despite this lack of knowledge, U.S. adults do believe that scientific research and education are important. About 4 in 5 adults think science education is "absolutely essential" or "very important" to the U.S. healthcare system (86%), the U.S. global reputation (79%), and the U.S. economy (77%).

"There has never been a greater need for investment in scientific research and education," said Academy Executive Director Dr. Gregory Farrington. "Many of the most pressing issues of our time—from global climate change to resource management and disease—can only be addressed with the help of science."

More information: www.calacademy.org/

Source: California Academy of Sciences

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