

Study finds public relatively unconcerned about nanotechnology risks

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A new study finds that the general public thinks getting a suntan poses a greater public health risk than nanotechnology or other nanoparticle applications. The study, from North Carolina State University, compared survey respondents' perceived risk of nanoparticles with 23 other public-health risks.

The study is the first to compare the public's perception of the risks associated with nanoparticles to other environmental and health safety risks. Researchers found that nanoparticles are perceived as being a relatively low risk.

“For example, 19 of the other public-health risks were perceived as more hazardous, including suntanning and drinking alcohol,” says Dr. Andrew Binder, an assistant professor of communication at NC State and co-author of a paper describing the study. “The only things viewed as less risky were cell-phone use, blood transfusions, commercial air travel and medical X-rays.”

In fact, 60 percent of respondents felt that nanoparticles posed either no health risk or only a slight health risk.

In the study, researchers asked a nationally representative panel of 307 people a battery of questions about how risky they believe nanoparticles are compared to 23 other public health risks – such as obesity, smoking, using cell phones and nuclear energy.

Policy implications of these findings could be substantial given the concerns expressed by proponents and opponents of [nanotechnology](#) that the public is wary of its environmental health and safety dangers. “The findings suggest just the opposite,” says Dr. David Berube, professor of communication at NC State and lead author of the study. “While it remains unclear whether nanoparticles are safe, they are not a major concern among the general public.”

The paper, “Comparing nanoparticle risk perceptions to other known EHS risks,” is forthcoming from the *Journal of Nanoparticle Research*. The paper was co-authored by Berube and Binder; Jordan Frith and Christopher Cummings, Ph.D. students at NC State; and Dr. Robert Oldendick of the University of South Carolina. The research was funded by the National Science Foundation.

Provided by North Carolina State University

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