

Survey Finds Broad Anxiety Among Gulf Residents

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ATLANTA — When it comes to getting information about the BP [oil spill](#), Gulf Coast residents trust Gov. [Bobby Jindal](#) of Louisiana more than Gov. [Haley Barbour](#) of Mississippi, and they trust Mr. Barbour more than [President Obama](#).

Most of them do not think it is safe to eat local seafood.

More than a third report children with new rashes or breathing problems, or who are nervous, fearful or “very sad” since the spill began. And even though the gusher of oil has been stanchied, almost a quarter of residents still fear

that they will have to move.

Those are some of the findings of the first major survey of Gulf Coast residents conducted since the BP well was capped. [The survey](#), conducted from July 19 to 25 by the [National Center for Disaster Preparedness](#) at Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University, suggests that the spill’s effects have not been contained along with the oil itself.

“There’s been a very overt effort by BP and the Coast Guard to project a sense that the crisis is over, but this is far from the case,” said Dr. Irwin Redlener, the director of the center and president of the Children’s Health Fund, a sponsor of the survey. “Our survey shows a persistent and overwhelming level of anxiety among families living near the coast, driven by both medical symptoms in their children as well as a substantial level of psychological stress.”

The survey included 1,200 coastal residents in Louisiana and Mississippi, most of whom live within 10 miles of the ocean.

One in five reported that their household income had dropped since the spill. Forty-three percent said they had been directly exposed to oil, either at beaches, on their property or in helping with the cleanup. Those who had been exposed were more than twice as likely to report that their children had developed physical or mental health problems since the spill. Also, families that had more concerns about their children’s mental health were more likely to report that they are considering moving.

One respondent, Shannon Drury, a mother of four in Venice, La., said her husband, a commercial fisherman, had been working for BP but was owed six weeks’ pay. For a time after the spill, Ms. Drury was forced to find work as a houseboat cleaner, coming home exhausted at night.

Ms. Drury’s 11-year-old daughter has grown more insecure, she said. Another child has developed a mysterious rash that Ms. Drury suspects is infected. Tensions over money, she said, reminded her of the warning from a visiting speaker from Alaska, who said the divorce rate there had skyrocketed after the [Exxon Valdez](#) disaster.

"I realize what the woman was talking about now, because it puts different strains on your family from what you've been used to," Ms. Drury said.

Another survey respondent, Sherry Mareno, 39, a Buras, La., fisherman who lost her job after the spill, is trying to sell her house and leave the Gulf Coast. She and her 11-year-old son both developed serious skin rashes, and she blames the chemical dispersants used to fight the oil.

"Mentally it's putting a strain on me and my whole family," said Ms. Mareno, a mother of two whose husband, a fisherman, also lost his job. "I'm just ready to get my family out of here."

Dr. Redlener acknowledged that it was difficult to pinpoint which ailments were related to the spill, but he said the researchers had made an effort to be conservative. The study excluded any children who had emotional or behavioral problems before the spill from its calculation that 19 percent of children had developed such problems.

It is not clear how much money is available to pay for mental health treatment for parents and children. Kenneth Feinberg, who is administering the BP claims process, has said mental health claims will not be covered. BP is considering requests from Mississippi and Louisiana for \$39 million to cover mental health treatment through October 2011. Ms. Drury said that her church was starting a family counseling program, but that she had not had any other offers of help.

Physical health problems will be covered under the claims process, a spokesman for BP said.

Governor Jindal won praise for both his handling of the spill and for his trustworthiness, with 78 percent of Louisiana residents saying they trusted him "a great deal" or "a good amount." He was trailed by local officials (75 percent), the Coast Guard (73 percent) and, among Mississippians, Governor Barbour (58 percent). Forty-eight percent of the respondents said they trusted Mr. Obama, and 31 percent said they trusted BP officials.

The survey showed some other differences in attitudes between Mississippi and Louisiana. In Louisiana, fewer than half of the participants said they thought it was not safe to eat gulf seafood. But in Mississippi, where the seafood industry is smaller, three-quarters were of the opinion that local seafood was not safe. Mississippi families were more likely to have cut back on beach trips and fishing than Louisiana families.

Fewer than 5 percent of the respondents said they had received any compensation from BP.

Robbie Brown contributed reporting.

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