

# Report finds differences in obesity risk factors for children attending schools in disadvantaged areas

10 November 2016, by Jamie Deasy



Credit: University College Dublin

There are significant differences in risk factors contributing to childhood obesity among children attending schools in disadvantaged areas compared to pupils attending other schools, according to a Health Services Executive-commissioned report by the National Nutrition Surveillance Centre (NNSC) at University College Dublin.

Children in third class who attended schools under the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity Schools) programme were less likely to eat fresh fruit daily (45.5 percent) compared to those in other schools (61.1 percent). They were also less likely to eat vegetables daily (41.6 percent) compared to [students](#) in other schools (56.2 percent).

About 61.3 percent of first-class [children](#) attending DEIS schools spent two hours or more watching television during the week compared to just 30.2 percent in other schools. Overall, DEIS students

from surveyed families also spent more time watching television at weekends.

However, first class DEIS schoolchildren were more likely to play outside for three hours or more at weekends compared to students in other schools (74.9 percent v 50.5 percent). In addition, some 29.3 percent of first class children in DEIS schools walked or cycled to schools, compared with 14 percent in other schools.

The report collected information on first and third class students through family questionnaires issued in 2010 and 2012. Approximately 3,000 families took part in the study.

Over the study period, more than nine out of ten children from both first and third class were found to eat breakfast every morning.

"Almost two-thirds of first-class children ate fruit on a daily basis while just under half of children ate vegetables on a daily basis," said Dr Mirjam Heinen, lead author, UCD School of Public Health, Physiotherapy and Sports Science.

"Our research also showed that sugary drinks were becoming less popular in children's diets with more parents saying their kids only sometimes or never consumed these in 2012 (50.4 percent) than 2010 (40.6 percent)," continued Dr Heinen.

More than 80 percent of first-class students were members of a sports club with almost three quarters participating in activities at least two days a week. Over three-quarters of first-class students travelled to [school](#) in a motorised vehicle during the same year.

"These findings highlight the need for policies that tackle overweight and obesity by working effectively

with children and their families in schools to promote healthy lifestyles and wellbeing," said Prof Cecily Kelleher, Director, National Nutrition Surveillance Centre.

"The HSE welcomes the insights of this report. They will help to inform the direction of our work to reduce the number of children who are overweight or obese in Ireland," said Sarah O'Brien, HSE National Lead, Healthy Eating and Active Living Programme.

**More information:** Descriptives of Childhood Obesity Factors: [www.hse.ie/eng/services/public.../SIresearchreport.pdf](http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/public.../SIresearchreport.pdf)

Provided by University College Dublin

APA citation: Report finds differences in obesity risk factors for children attending schools in disadvantaged areas (2016, November 10) retrieved 7 May 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-11-differences-obesity-factors-children-schools.html>

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