

Moving in the right direction: More BC youth are physically active than a decade ago

A new report released today by the McCreary Centre Society shows that between 1998 and 2008, participation in strenuous exercise among BC youth increased, as did weekly participation in sports and dance and aerobics classes. Nearly half of students took part in one or more types of physical activity at least 4 times a week.

A number of benefits were linked to increased activity. Using results from the 2008 BC Adolescent Health Survey, completed by 29,000 youth in grades 7-12, researchers at McCreary found that youth involved in physical activity were more likely to report positive mental health, good nutritional behaviours, feeling satisfied with their body image, and injury prevention behaviours, such as seatbelt and helmet use. They were also less likely to report risky behaviours such as smoking, using cocaine or ecstasy, or misusing prescription pills.

However, the results also show that there are some young people who are missing out on the benefits of being active, including new Canadians, those who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual, youth who have to work in excess of 20 hours a week, and those living in poverty or with an unstable home life.

"I think the report spells out the many benefits of being active," said Annie Smith, Executive Director of the McCreary Centre Society "but it also shows we really need to provide more affordable and inclusive opportunities for young people who might not have the chance to get involved."

In other results, the study showed that while generally, 'more was better' where physical activity was concerned, this was not always the case around alcohol use. "Higher levels of binge drinking and chewing tobacco seem to go along with being heavily involved in organised sports for older youth," Smith pointed out. "It's important for coaches and sporting superstars to act as positive role models."

In addition to needing positive role models, Smith noted that organised physical activity gives youth access to another supportive adult they can talk to when they have a problem, or need a listening ear. "This is important, because youth consistently tell us they can't grow up healthy without this sort of support. It's a benefit of coached sports and dance classes that we don't always acknowledge."

Leading Canadian sports psychologist Dr. David Cox, from Simon Fraser University, commented, "The increased interest in many sports since the Winter Olympics and Paralympics were held here has given us a golden opportunity to engage young people in sports and exercise programs that they can enjoy well into adulthood. This report clearly shows us the benefits of being active in reducing risks and increasing protective factors."



The McCreary Centre Society is a non-government, non-profit organization committed to improving the health of B.C. youth through research, education and community-based projects.

Founded in 1977, the Society sponsors and promotes a wide range of activities and research to address unmet health needs of young people.

Contact

*Annie Smith
Executive Director*

*3552 Hastings Street
East
Vancouver, B.C. V5K
2A7*

*Tel: 604-291-1996
ext 225*

*Cell: 604 719 1474
Fax: 604-291-7308*

*Email:
annie@mcs.bc.ca*

www.mcs.bc.ca

BACKGROUND

The data for this report came from the 2008 BC Adolescent Health Survey (AHS) which provides the most comprehensive picture of the physical and emotional health of BC youth, including risk and protective factors. This report was funded by the Vancouver Foundation.

This BC Adolescent Health Survey is conducted every 5 years by the McCreary Centre Society. Over 29,000 BC public school students in grades 7-12 completed the survey between February and June 2008. Previous surveys have been conducted in 1992, 1998 and 2003. The survey was administered by public health nurses in 50 of BC's 59 school districts.

As with previous McCreary BC Adolescent Health Survey reports, the results of this report will be used by government agencies, schools and communities to plan and assess youth programs and services. The survey provides decision makers and others interested in youth health with up-to-date and comprehensive information on the health picture of young people in BC, as well as risk and protective factors that can influence their healthy transitions to adulthood.

The survey is designed to consider emerging youth health issues, and to track trends over time. The 2008 AHS included 147 questions asking youth about their perceptions of their current physical and emotional health, risky behaviours and health promoting practices. Healthy development for youth includes many contributing factors, and the survey also asks about broader issues such as family connectedness, school safety and peer relationships.

Key Findings

- Most BC youth participate in some form of physical activity every week. Eighty-eight percent of males and 81% of females participated in at least one type of activity including organised sports, informal sports, dance and aerobics.
- The percentage of students who took strenuous exercise daily or almost daily rose from 22% in 1998 to 26% in 2008.
- There were some regional differences in sports and exercise participation. Youth living in rural areas were more likely than urban based students to take part in informal sports opportunities (such as hiking and road hockey). Rural females were also more likely than their urban counterparts to be engaged in organised sports and dance/aerobics.
- Some groups were at greater risk of not being involved in sports and exercise, including youth who went to bed hungry because there was not enough money for food at home, youth with an unstable home life, immigrant youth and youth who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual.
- Involvement in physical activity was associated with better nutritional behaviours such as eating breakfast and eating healthy foods. For

example, 59% of youth who exercised daily or almost daily in the past week ate breakfast compared to 43% of those who did not exercise.

- Youth involved in sports and exercise were less likely to use a range of substances, but older youth heavily involved in sports were more likely to have tried alcohol and to have drunk at risky levels than youth with more moderate levels of sports participation.
- In general, physical activity was associated with a lower rate of self-harm, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. Also, the more youth participated in strenuous exercise or sports, the higher their self-esteem scores and the more likely they were to report feeling good about themselves.
- There was a link between dance/aerobics and health risks such as unhealthy eating behaviours and amphetamine use, particularly for males. However, this type of exercise offered an outlet for youth experiencing other challenges in their lives who were not engaged in any other form of physical activity.
- Having skills and competencies can be an important protective factor for youth. Students who said they were good at sports were less likely to report extreme stress, to have considered suicide or attempted suicide in the past year.
- Youth who felt that they had input into their activities, and that their ideas were listened to and acted upon were more likely to be engaged in physical activities.
- Equally, being involved in sports and exercise was linked to reduced risky behaviours and improved health among even the most vulnerable youth.

The full report is available as a pdf from www.mcs.bc.ca.

Webinar presentations of the findings will take place

Date: Tuesday, January 25, 2011

Time: 9:30 AM - 11:00 AM PST

Date: Tuesday, January 25, 2011

Time: 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM PST

Date: Thursday, January 27, 2011

Time: 9:30 AM - 10:30 AM PST

Date: Thursday, January 27, 2011

Time: 3:30 PM - 4:30 PM PST