

Facts

Backgrounder 2009

Health Assessment of School-Aged Children



The aim of the Health Assessment of School-Aged Children project is to gather data on the nutrition, physical activity, smoking behaviour, and self-perception of grade six students in BC.

The project is managed by the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA), implemented in partnership with participating schools, and endorsed by BC's regional health authorities. It is funded by the BC Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport, PHSA and Child Health BC.

What is the Health Assessment of School-Aged Children?

The Health Assessment of School-Aged Children is a project to help BC schools plan and evaluate their student health-improvement activities by providing accurate information about the nutrition, physical activity, smoking behaviour, and self-perception of grade six students. The health assessment process consists of two parts, both focused on grade six students:

- A student questionnaire, in collaboration with the Centre for Behavioural Research and Program Evaluation at the University of Waterloo
- Height and weight measurements

How are the health assessments done?

Students complete the questionnaire under the supervision of school staff. Questionnaire topics include diet, physical activity, smoking behaviours, and self-perception. Trained project staff will then record each student's height and weight. These measurements will be taken in a private area, away from the view of other students.

The Health Assessment will be taken during school hours. The questionnaire will take students 20-40 minutes to complete. Height and weight measurements will take about two minutes per student.

All collected data are kept both confidential and anonymous. Individual student data are not shared with anyone, including parents and teachers. Students do not see their measurement readings. None of the data can be linked to individual students.

How were schools selected for the project?

This is the second year of the Health Assessment project. Last year, schools across the province were invited, and 17 participated. Those schools as well as others from the BC Healthy Schools Network were invited to participate this year. Nineteen schools are taking part in the 2009 assessment.

Do children have to participate?

No. It is up to parents and students to decide whether they want to participate.

How does this project fit with other health-related school projects?

A number of health projects are underway in schools across BC. The Health Assessment project will provide vital health information about school-aged children that is not currently available. As a result, it can be used to complement other school-based health initiatives such as Action Schools! BC.

This is the second year of the Health Assessment of School-Aged Children, involving 19 BC schools. The project feasibility was demonstrated through a small trial in spring 2007, and in 2008, 17 schools took part.

Good nutrition and physical activity are critical for children to maintain a healthy weight.





Most children consume up to a third of their calories and expend half of their energy while at school.

What useful information will schools receive through the project?

Every participating school will receive a summary report, reflecting the high-level results for their school only. The report provides a “snapshot” of student health behaviour that can be used to:

- Create an overall profile of student health behaviour
- Determine what areas of health behaviour require most attention
- Monitor changes in health behaviour and results over time

Schools are encouraged to share the results of their health assessment reports with staff, students, parents, and the community. An overall report showing the results from all participating schools will also be produced. This report will not reveal any individual school results or any individual student data.

Schools provide an ideal setting for collecting information on the health-related behaviours of children.

When will the health assessments be done?

Assessments will take place in January, February and March 2009. Reports will be compiled and distributed back to participating schools by April 2009.

Can parents see the questionnaire before the assessment takes place?

Yes. A copy of the questionnaire will be available at all participating schools.

Have health assessments like this been done elsewhere in Canada?

Similar school-based health assessments have been done in Alberta, Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Although a limited range of data are currently collected about the health and health-related behaviours of children in BC, this information applies only to children over the age of 12. The Health Assessment project is intended to help fill critical information gaps concerning the health of our school children.

Who is responsible for the project?

The project is managed by the Provincial Health Services Authority’s Population and Public Health program, implemented in partnership with participating schools and endorsed by BC’s regional health authorities.

Over the last 20 years child obesity and overweight in Canada have increased to epidemic proportions. This trend is cause for significant concern as obesity is strongly associated with such chronic diseases as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and various cancers.

For more information, contact

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