

SHIP and Schools

Working to reduce chronic disease in Minnesota

School-age children and youth spend roughly half of their waking hours in school. By creating school systems that continue to support healthy school environments and model healthy behavior, everyone benefits.

The Role of Schools in the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP)

Schools are the lifeblood of an informed citizenry and the heart of activity for many Minnesota communities. Children learn some of life's most important lessons in school. That is why schools are considered a vital piece of the SHIP initiative.

SHIP works to improve the health of all Minnesotans, and schools are uniquely situated to support healthy behavior of children and youth. Because children learn, eat and play at school during the years when they are acquiring lifestyle habits, an environment that supports and models healthy behavior is critical to their becoming healthy, productive adults.

The Current Situation

Schools continue to experience competing priorities that sometimes result in decreased emphasis on the health of students. In recent years, many schools have seen decreases in physical education, health education and recess. School food service operations, clubs, booster organizations and sport programs sometimes promote low-nutrient, high-calorie foods to improve revenue. Meanwhile, the obesity crisis continues, leading to increased chronic diseases in adults and children.¹

National Data

More than one-third of children and adolescents are overweight.² Lifestyle factors contributing to being overweight include poor diet and insufficient physical activity. For young people, data³ indicate:

- 79 percent eat fewer than five servings of fruits and vegetables every day.
- 65 percent do not meet the recommended levels of physical activity.
- 35 percent watch three or more hours of TV or video every day.

Minnesota Data

The Minnesota Student Survey is a triennial survey of sixth-, ninth- and 12th-graders that examines students' reported opinions, behaviors and experiences related to both risk and protective factors.⁴ Among ninth-grade students:

- About half report exercising for a combined total of 30 minutes at least five of the last seven days.
- Approximately one-quarter are overweight based on their Body Mass Index.
- Slightly more than half of students drank pop or soda the previous day.
- Less than 20 percent of students eat five or more fruits and vegetables a day.
- Approximately three-quarters of students report that they have never smoked a cigarette.
- 85 percent of students believe that their close friends would disapprove if they smoked one or more packs of cigarettes a day.

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Commissioner's Office
625 Robert Street North
PO Box 64975
St. Paul, MN 55164-0975
(651) 201-4989
www.health.state.mn.us

Benefits of Healthy Schools^{5, 6}

- Improved attendance of students and staff
- Improved academic performance
- Improved classroom behavior
- Increased graduation rates
- Motivated school staff
- Increased community connectedness

Examples of SHIP Interventions for Schools

- Implement a post-secondary school policy of not accepting any funding, curricula, sponsorships or other materials from any tobacco companies or their front groups for technical schools, community colleges, colleges and universities.
- Implement a tobacco-free policy to apply to students, staff and visitors on all post-secondary school grounds, in student housing, and at all school-sponsored events on technical school, community college, college and university campuses.
- Implement policies and practices that create active schools by increasing opportunities for non-motorized transportation (walking and biking to and from school) and access to school recreation facilities.
- Implement policies and practices that support quality school-based physical education.

References:

- 1) National Center for Health Statistics
http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/hestats/overweight/overwght_child_03.htm
- 2) Ogden CL, Carroll MD, Flegal KM. High Body Mass Index for Age Among US Children and Adolescents, 2003—2006. *JAMA*. 2008;299(20):2401—2405.
- 3) CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey results
<http://cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm>
- 4) Minnesota Student Survey Trends
<http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/SafeHealth/documents/Report/033657.pdf>
- 5) CDC Community Prevention Guide
<http://www.thecommunityguide.org/>
- 6) U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Healthy People 2010*. 2nd ed. With Understanding and Improving Health and Objectives for Improving Health. 2 vols. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 2000.
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