



A Summary

Background



The Student Health Survey is a cross-sectional survey that ran in 2006/2007, 2008/2009, and 2010/2011 in Saskatoon Health Region. The survey informs Saskatoon Health Region, partners, and the public about the overall health of children in grades 5 to 8; determines differences in health based on neighbourhood and income; provides evidence that will influence policy and practice; and supports the delivery of programs and services aimed at addressing children's health issues.

What We Did



The 2010/2011 survey ran for the third time in the Saskatoon Public School Division and Greater Saskatoon Catholic School Division in winter/spring of 2011. Schools from Horizon and Prairie Spirit School Divisions participated for the first time. The 2010/2011 survey had questions about mental health, physical activity, nutrition, risky behaviours (smoking and drinking), and bullying. Four thousand three hundred and fourteen students from schools in the city of Saskatoon participated in the survey with a response rate of 45.4%. The response rate of students from rural Saskatoon Health Region schools was 50.9%, with 1,469 students in grades 5 to 8 participating in the survey.

What We Found



The Good News: There have been improvements in the areas of physical activity, bullying, and mental health over the past few years, which is very promising. This may mean that the programs that have been put in place in response to previous survey findings are having a positive effect (e.g. Saskatoon Health Region's Health Promoting Schools Program, and programs introduced in individual schools).



Improvements Still Needed: We also found the percentage of students who are optimally active still remains low. There is also a need for improvement in nutrition levels, as a majority of the students reported they do not consume the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables. These results indicate that approaches to improving the health of students in the areas of nutrition and physical activity across all of Saskatoon Health Region are required.



Income and Geography Matter: The survey also showed there were significant and sometimes startling differences by neighbourhood income and geography. Students that attend schools in low-income neighbourhoods in Saskatoon are generally not doing as well as the students that attend schools in higher-income neighbourhoods. This suggests that targeted programming is required in low-income neighbourhood schools.



Other social and economic factors that influence health should also be considered and acted upon (e.g., neighbourhood-level factors that contribute to poor health such as stress worsened by safety concerns, violence, lack of services, and access to green space for recreation). Previous research has also found that differences in health in Saskatoon are often associated with income, so the effects of poverty should be a key concern when working to improve student health.



Urban and Rural Differences: There were some significant differences between students in urban schools compared to students in rural schools. The largest difference was for having tried alcohol. This finding suggests that programming in rural schools should include a focus on the negative health effects of drinking alcohol. More research is also needed to determine the root causes of higher drinking rates in rural Saskatoon Health Region in order to implement appropriate programming and policy changes.



To Sum Up

As with previous rounds of the survey, results from 2010/2011 have already influenced changes in individual schools, and will be an important tool for planning and decision-making into the future. We've heard positive stories such as:

"To support social skills programming as identified from the survey results and teacher input we have purchased a new social skills program that addresses specific needs for our students."



"Our School Community Council is very involved in having parents and community look at bullying issues within the community. They have already sponsored two parent information evenings and are planning a third before the end of the school year. Our student engagement goal for next year will reflect our policy on bullying."



Options for future data collection on student health are currently being explored. Student Health Survey results suggest that a combination of approaches should be used such as targeted health promotion programming in low-income neighbourhood schools, as well as policy changes that would affect the other social and economic factors that influence health such as income.



Want to find out more information?

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