VERMONT

Department of Health

fit & healthy vermonters

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School Health & Wellness

Schools Play an Important Role in Health:

- More than 50 percent of U.S. children obtain either breakfast or lunch from school meal programs.[1]
- Increased participation in the school breakfast program is associated with increases in test scores, daily attendance, class participation, and reductions in absenteeism and tardiness.[2]
- Labels and signs on school campuses influence a student's food choices.[3]
- A review of results from nearly 200 studies including adults and children found that physical activity supports learning.[4]
- Moderate physical activity has a positive effect on the immune system. Coupled with good nutrition, activity can help prevent colds and the flu, two of the most common childhood ailments.

Nutrition:

- Undernourished students are less able to resist infection and are more likely to become sick, resulting in more missed school days.[5]
- Iron deficiency is one of the most common nutritional problems of children in the United States. Children with iron deficiency tend to do poorly on tests due to tiredness, short attention spans, decreased work ability, and reduced resistance to infection.[6]
- Twenty years ago, boys drank twice as much milk as soft drinks, and girls drank 50 percent more milk than soft drinks. Today, children consume twice as much soft drinks as milk. [1]
- Children and adolescents who are overweight miss about four school days a month. Frequent absenteeism leads to poor performance in school. [1]
- From 1989 and 1996, children's calorie intake increased by about 80 to 230 extra calories per day. [1]
- Consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, such as soda and fruit-flavored drinks, is associated with obesity in children.[7]
- Forty-three percent of elementary schools, 74 percent of middle schools, and 98 percent of senior high schools have vending machines, school stores, or snack bars.[1]
- Nineteen percent of schools in the U.S. give students less than 20 minutes to eat lunch.[3]

Physical Activity:

- Achievement improves even when physical education classes reduce the time for academics. A reduction of 240 minutes per week in class time for academics to enable increased physical activity led to consistently higher mathematics scores.[9, 10]
- Physical activity is related to higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of anxiety and stress, which are associated with academic performance.[11]
- There is a positive connection between fitness and test results. Students with the highest fitness scores have the highest test scores.[12]

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Vermont Students

Nutrition:

- One out of four children in grades eight through 12 are overweight or are at risk for being overweight. (At risk for overweight is defined as Body Mass Index (BMI)-for-age $\geq 85^{th}$ percentile to $< 95^{th}$ percentile. Overweight is defined as BMI-for-age $\geq 95^{th}$ percentile.)[13]
- Seventy-six percent of Vermont students eat less than five fruits and vegetables per day.[14]
- Fifty-five percent of Vermont students buy school lunch.[15]
- Seventeen percent of Vermont students participate in the school breakfast program.[15]
- From 1995 to 2004 the number of free or reduced priced lunches served increased by 16 percent.[15]

Physical Activity:

- Only 27 percent of students in grades eight to12 exercise moderately five or more days per week.[15]
- Over one-third of students spend three or more hours a school day watching TV, playing video games or playing on the computer for fun.[15]
- Ninety-two percent of eighth graders, but only 24 percent of twelfth graders participate in at least one physical education class per week.[15]

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