

Pinellas County School Elementary Health Survey

The Elementary Health Survey was designed to determine the prevalence of health risk behaviors among elementary school children and to provide comparable data to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS).

What is Elementary Health Survey?

This survey was developed and administered by the Pinellas County School System for the Steps to a Healthier Florida program. The objective was to track health risk behaviors among elementary school children. The survey was administered to third grade students in the Steps Intervention Area (IA) schools in spring 2006. The questionnaire consisted of 29 questions and was administered by the physical education teachers.

Who were the Respondents?

The survey was administered to 1227 third grade students in the Steps intervention area schools.

The survey respondents consisted of 50.4% females and 49.6% males. The majority of the survey respondents were either 8 years old (25.5%) or 9 years old (57.8%).

What were the survey questions?

The health survey included 29 questions that covered behaviors that can broadly be grouped into the following health risk areas: 1) Physical activity; 2) Injuries; 3) Diet and nutrition; 4) Tobacco use; 5) Alcohol and other drug use; and 6) Miscellaneous.

Summary of Results

Physical activity:

Play outside: 27.7% of the third graders get less than the recommended 60 minutes of daily moderate physical activity.

Watch Television: 42.5% of the third graders watch 3 or more hours of television on an average school day and 19 % watch 2 hours of television.

Video or Computer games: Approximately one of five (19.9%) third graders play video or computer games for 3 or more hours on an average school day.

Member of a sports team or a physical activity group: 59.8% of the students have been a regular member of a sports team or a physical activity group.

Injuries:

Car seat belt use: 70.2% of the students always wear a seat belt when riding in a car.

Bicycle helmet use: 35.8% of students who ride a bicycle always use a helmet and 35.3% never use a helmet.

Roller blade, scooter, or skateboard helmet use: 30% of the third graders who rollerblade, ride a scooter, or skateboard always use a helmet and 43% never use a helmet.

Played with matches or lighters without adult permission: 15.8% of the third graders have played with matches or lighters without adult permission.

Ever carried a weapon while not in school: 14.3% of the students have carried weapons such as a gun, beebee gun, pocket knife, or bow and arrow.

Swimming: 46.7% of the third graders have been swimming without adult supervision.

Diet and Nutrition:

Breakfast: 82.3% of the students eat their breakfast.

Meals in a restaurant: 47.4% of the students eat their meals in a restaurant at least 2-3 times a week.

Milk Consumption: 64.1% of the third graders consume less than the recommended 3 glasses of milk per day.

Treat foods: 41.8% of the third graders eat treat foods such as chips, candy, soda, cookies, and donuts at least 2-3 items a day.

Tobacco Use

Cigarette or cigar smoking: 4.7% of the third graders have tried cigarettes or cigars and 1.2% have smoked everyday for a week or more.

Alcohol and other drug use

Alcohol use: 19.5% of the third graders have had a drink of beer, wine, or alcohol, other than a few sips.

Marijuana use: 1.9% of the third graders have tried marijuana.

Miscellaneous

Hand washing: 83.1% of the third graders wash their hands before eating.

Recommendations

More than 61% of the third graders watch 2 or more hours of television on an average school day. Watching television is associated with decreased physical activity and increased obesity.

Programs should to be initiated for parents and students to heighten awareness to decrease television/video game time and increase physical activity to at least 60 minutes a day.

More than 1 in 4 third graders get less than the recommended amount of physical activity. Approximately 42% of the third graders eat treat foods such as candy, cookie or donut 2-3 times per day. Programs should to be initiated for parents and students to heighten awareness about the importance of physical activity and nutrition. A recent study found that people who snack on sweet food do not mind substituting their “junk snack food” with fruits. Although this study targeted adults the same principle could potentially apply to students.

There has been an increase in the percentage of students who engage in risky behaviors such as riding a bicycle, scooter, roller blade or skate board without wearing a helmet. This could lead to an increase in number of unintentional injuries and/or death. Programs should be initiated for parents and students on the consequences of such risky behaviors.