

Australia's school kids at great risk of chronic diseases

The latest results from Heart Foundation and Cancer Council funded research published in the 20 February issue of the *Medical Journal of Australia* show that lifestyle factors of Australia's school kids are putting them at greater risk of developing chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer in later life.

"Teaching young people the importance of making healthy choices now for the benefit of their quality of life in the future is an essential part of being a good parent but the responsibility lies not only with parents but also government and the wider community," said Tony Thirlwell, Heart Foundation NSW – CEO.

Results from the National Secondary Student's Diet and Activity (NaSSDA) survey show nearly one in four secondary school students was categorised as overweight (18%) or obese (5%) and that they were more likely to be male, to come from lower socioeconomic areas, engage in less physical activity, spend more time using electronic media and sleep for a shorter duration.

"Watching television, using a computer and playing electronic games, which usually involve sitting for long periods of time, have become a big part of young people's leisure time. However we know that children and teenagers who spend less time doing these things have better health than those who spend too much time doing these things," Mr Thirlwell said.

"Not being active is one of the reasons why kids grow up to be overweight or obese as adults. Being overweight puts a lot of strain on bodies and causes lots of health problems including heart disease as people get older," Mr Thirlwell said.

Cancer Council Australia spokesperson, Kathy Chapman, said these results show the importance of a comprehensive approach to targeting obesity in adolescence.

"There isn't one single magic bullet to turning around the numbers of overweight teenagers, what we need is a holistic approach from all sectors of government and the community so that the teenagers of today don't become the statistics for chronic disease in the future," Ms Chapman said.

"Special attention needs to be placed on developing programs to target those from more disadvantaged areas," Ms Chapman said.

On the Healthy Kids website (www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au), the Heart Foundation provides tips, ideas and practical advice for families and children. The website is a joint initiative of the NSW Ministry of Health, Education and Communities, and Sport and Recreation, as well as the NSW Division of the National Heart Foundation.

About NaSSDA

The NaSSDA survey 2009-10 is jointly funded by the state Cancer Councils, Cancer Council Australia and the [National Heart Foundation of Australia](http://www.nationalheartfoundation.org.au).

The study of over 12,000 students in years eight to 11 across 237 schools fills a significant gap in existing data in Australia by establishing an ongoing commitment to the standardised monitoring of adolescents' body weight, and dietary and physical activity behaviour at both a state and national level.

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