

Media Release

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5 in 6 Aussie teens not meeting the recommended guidelines for physical activity

Aussie teens fall short of physical activity guidelines

Cancer Council is calling for increased support for younger Australians to get active following new data revealing that only 1 in 6 (16%) Australian secondary school children (aged 12 – 17 years) meet the recommended guidelines for physical activity.

Cancer Council's National Secondary Students' Diet and Activity (NaSSDA) study surveyed teens to ask them questions about their diet and lifestyle habits.

The survey found that while few teens are getting enough exercise, there is some promising news, with the latest survey reporting six in 10 teens (61%) get the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity at least four days a week, an increase from five in 10 (52%) in 2009-10.

Clare Hughes, Chair of Cancer Council's national Nutrition and Physical Activity Committee explained while it is encouraging to see some improvements, the figures still show very few young people are meeting the recommended guidelines.

"Physical activity in teenage years sets up good habits for your adult years. Being physically active reduces the risk of unhealthy weight gain and reduces the risk of developing 13 different types of cancer later in life including endometrial, breast and bowel cancer so we really want to see as many teens as possible setting up good exercise habits while they are young."

Ms Hughes continued, "When we look at the combined cohort, over half (52%) said a lack of physical activity options in school was a barrier and almost as many (48%) said they were too far from school to walk or ride."

When comparing differences in genders, boys were more than twice as likely to meet the physical activity recommendations than girls (21% compared to 9%), with girls citing a number of personal barriers to participating in physical activity, the most common being feeling self-conscious when undertaking physical activity.

Girls were around twice as likely to note feeling self-conscious, with 30% of girls reporting this, compared to only 16% of males feeling this way.

When looking at reasons for being physically active, girls were more likely than boys to report weight management as a reason, with 77% of girls reporting this compared to 73% of boys.

"Three in four students agreed that both their school and their parents encourage them to undertake sports and physical activities."

Ms Hughes said "We're pleased to see physical activity addressed in the draft National Preventative Health Strategy and call on the Australian government to support people to be more active and to develop a national active transport strategy that will encourage walking, cycling and public transport use.

"We know how important physical activity is for overall health and wellbeing, including preventing cancers of the breast, bowel and endometrium.

“We want to ensure that there are the systems and environments in place for all young Australians to develop strong physical activity habits that they can carry on, reducing the risk of health problems including cancer later in life.”

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For more information please contact:

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See Cancer Council's [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

About the National Secondary Students' Diet and Activity survey

The National Secondary Students' Diet and Activity (NaSSDA) survey is an initiative of Cancer Council Australia that provides regular monitoring of young people's beliefs and behaviours surrounding diet and physical activity, as well as their experience of food marketing, to inform obesity prevention policy development and evaluate implemented strategies.

This report, from the 2018 survey, summarised the current prevalence of physical activity among Australian secondary school students and changes over time. It also explores differences by sex in perceptions of barriers to and facilitators of physical activity.

Nationally representative samples of Australian secondary school students in year levels 8 to 11 (ages 12 to 17 years) were surveyed in 2009-10 (n=13,790 from 238 schools), 2012-13 (n=10,309 from 196 schools) and 2018 (n=9,102 from 104 schools) using a self-report web-based questionnaire.