

US immigrant children less physically active than US-born children

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Immigrant children in the United States appear to be less physically active and less likely to participate in sports than U.S.-born children, according to a report in the August issue of *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*.

"Because of a dramatic increase in the prevalence of childhood obesity and diabetes mellitus during the past two decades, physical activity has assumed an increasingly prominent role in disease prevention and health promotion efforts in the United States and is considered one of the 10 leading health indicators for the nation," according to background information in the article. This has resulted in a closer monitoring of physical activity and sedentary behavior levels in children and adults in the U.S.

With immigrants now accounting for 12.6 percent of the total U.S. population, "it is important to know how patterns of physical activity, inactivity and sedentary behaviors for this increasing segment of the population differ from those of the majority native population," the authors note.

Gopal K. Singh, Ph.D., of the Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Rockville, Md., and colleagues analyzed data from the 2003 National Survey of Children's Health, a telephone survey measuring regular physical activity, inactivity, television watching and lack of sports participation in U.S. children. Nativity/immigrant status was also noted.

Of the total participants, more than 11 percent of U.S. children were found to be physically inactive, while 73.5 percent engaged in physical activity three or more days per week. More than 42 percent of children did not participate in sports and 17 percent watched three or more hours of television per day.

"Physical inactivity and sedentary behaviors varied widely among children in various ethnic-immigrant groups," the authors write. "For example, 22.5 percent of immigrant Hispanic children were physically inactive compared with 9.5 percent of U.S.-born white children with U.S.-born parents." Immigrant children were more likely to be physically inactive and less likely to participate in sports than native children; "they were, however, less likely to watch television three or more hours per day than native children, although the nativity gap narrowed with increasing acculturation levels."

Source: JAMA and Archives Journals

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