

Coached extracurricular activities may help prevent pre-adolescent smoking and drinking

April 30 2014

Dartmouth researchers have found that tweens (preadolescents aged 10-14) who participate in a coached team sport a few times a week or more are less likely to try smoking. Their findings on the relationship between extracurricular activity and health risk behaviors are reported in "The relative roles of types of extracurricular activity on smoking and drinking initiation among tweens," which was recently published in *Academic Pediatrics*.

"How children spend their time matters," said lead author Anna M. Adachi-Mejia, PhD, a member of Norris Cotton Cancer Center's Cancer Control Research Program. "In a nationally representative sample we found that tweens who participate in [sports](#) with a [coach](#) were less likely to try smoking. Parents and guardians may think that tweens need less adult supervision when they are not in school. However, our research suggests that certain coached extracurricular activities can help prevent tween smoking and drinking."

Researchers conducted a telephone survey of 6,522 US students between 10 and 14 years old in 2003 to determine if the influence of any kind of sport, versus sports where a coach is present, would be associated with risk of smoking and drinking. They developed a novel approach to examine the relation between extracurricular activities and adolescent smoking and drinking. Measures included participation in [team sports](#) with a coach, other sports without a coach, music, school clubs, and other clubs. A little over half of the students reported participating in team sports with a coach (55.5 percent) and without a coach (55.4

percent) a few times per week or more. Many had minimal to no participation in school clubs (74.2 percent); however, most reported being involved in other clubs (85.8 percent). A little less than half participated in music, choir, dance, and/or band lessons. Over half of participants involved in religious activity did those activities a few times per week or more.

The study found that team sport participation with a coach was the only extracurricular activity associated with lower risk of trying smoking compared to none or minimal participation. Participating in other clubs was the only extracurricular activity associated with lower risk of trying drinking compared to none or minimal participation. Their analyses controlled for over twenty measures of characteristics and behaviors known to be associated with [health risks](#).

Other studies examining teen extracurricular activity have focused on academic outcomes and adolescent development, or have focused on alcohol and marijuana use more than tobacco when examining [health risk behaviors](#).

"Unlike those studies, we examined a younger age group, and we focused on the relationship between extracurricular activity and health risk behaviors," said Adachi-Mejia. "Rather than asking about sports participation in the context of activity only, we framed our questions to ask about team sports participation with a coach and participation in other sports without a coach—none of the other studies have asked specifically about coaching."

We know that team sports participation offers cardiovascular and other benefits, including obesity prevention. This study shows that specific type [extracurricular activities](#) may be associated with risk of youth [smoking](#) and drinking initiation. And while more research is needed to better understand the underlying reasons behind these differences,

Adachi-Mejia notes that the study offers yet another reason to be thinking about what kinds of team sports offerings are available for youth.

"Unfortunately, in the transition from the tween to adolescent years, coached sports teams face pressure to shift from a philosophy of inclusion to a greater emphasis on winning," she said. "This shift potentially shuts out tweens with fewer skills and/or lesser interest in facing the pressures associated with increased competition. I'd like to encourage communities and schools to explore the possibility of offering noncompetitive, affordable team sports with a coach."

Provided by The Geisel School of Medicine at Dartmouth

Citation: Coached extracurricular activities may help prevent pre-adolescent smoking and drinking (2014, April 30) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-04-extracurricular-pre-adolescent.html>

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