

Free sports physicals reveal high rates of obesity in student athletes

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Researchers at Thomas Jefferson University found similar rates of obesity and high blood pressure readings in student-athletes as would be expected in the general adolescent population, which may suggest that participation in athletics does not protect against these conditions. They published their findings in *The Journal of Pediatrics*.

The study stems from the [Athlete Health Organization](#), a non-profit that provides free pre-participation evaluations to student-athletes in Philadelphia each year before the start of the season to identify students who might be at risk for injury, illness or death. Volunteer physicians gather biometric information and provide a physical exam including an electrocardiogram. Over four years, the organization provided physicals to over 2,700 athletes and caught life-threatening conditions in a handful of students.

"We founded the Athlete Health Organization to promote safe sports activity but we can also use these events to evaluate the overall health of this population," said David Shipon, M.D., CEO of Athlete Health Organization and cardiologist at Thomas Jefferson University Hospitals. "This is our first research study and we found alarmingly high rates of obesity and high [blood pressure readings](#) among adolescent student-athletes."

The team found that 20 percent of participants were overweight, 24 percent obese and 14.8 percent had higher than [normal blood pressure](#) readings. Furthermore, [body mass index](#) correlated strongly with [high](#)

[blood pressure](#) readings. These numbers are comparable to the general adolescent population.

"Although the general presumption is that athletics and activity should help with weight and [blood pressure control](#), our study suggests that student-athletes in Philadelphia are suffering from these conditions at the same alarming rate as their peers who do not sign up for school sports," said Jill Kropa, M.D., first author and sports medicine fellow at Thomas Jefferson University at the time of the study.

The study authors hope that their research results will raise awareness of health issues affecting the student-athlete population.

More information: Kropa, J., et al. High Prevalence of Obesity and High Blood Pressure in Urban Student-Athletes. *The Journal of Pediatrics*. [DOI: 10.1016/j.jpeds.2016.07.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2016.07.006)

Provided by Thomas Jefferson University

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