



*snapshot*  
LOOKING AT TEEN HEALTH IN THE  
THUNDER BAY DISTRICT

Highlights and recommendations from the School Health Action, Planning and Evaluation System (SHAPES) Survey on mental fitness, smoking, physical activity and healthy eating of grade 9-11 students in the Thunder Bay District.



Thunder Bay District  
**Health Unit**



THUNDER BAY  
**Regional Health**  
SCIENCES CENTRE

The information in this report is adapted from:

University of Waterloo.  
The School Health Action, Planning & Evaluation System (SHAPES): Mental fitness, smoking, physical activity and healthy eating at all schools in the Thunder Bay District. Waterloo, ON: Propel Centre for Population Health Impact, 2010.

## Introduction

In 2009, The School Health Action, Planning and Evaluation System (SHAPES) survey was conducted by the Thunder Bay District Health Unit, Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre – Regional Cancer Care and the SHAPES team at the Propel Centre for Population Health Impact at the University of Waterloo.



Nearly 3500 high school students in grades 9 to 12 across the Thunder Bay District were asked a series of questions about their mental fitness, physical activity, tobacco use and eating behaviours. This report highlights some of the key results and recommendations that were revealed through the SHAPES survey. What makes this report unique is that it provides comprehensive information local to our area. It also provides data on mental fitness, which is clearly related to tobacco use, physical activity and eating behaviours.

The school environment plays an important role in helping students live healthy lives. Schools are uniquely positioned to influence the health and well-being of students, ideally in partnership with the home and school community.

The information contained in this report can be shared by school staff, students, parents, and the community to identify challenges regarding student health and work together towards creative solutions that improve overall student wellness. While using this information, it will be important to consider enhancing mental fitness in order to impact not only the emotional and psychological well-being of students, but also to decrease smoking and increase physical activity and healthy eating among students.

### Change is more likely to succeed when schools:

- Communicate, coordinate and collaborate with students, parents, and community and health organizations. Including various perspectives builds support for solutions and capacity to achieve the overall objectives.
- Use a comprehensive school health approach to promote healthy behaviours (see page 7).
- Evaluate results.

## Mental Fitness

Mental fitness is described as a person's ability to think about, plan and act on personal decisions which can affect emotional, social and physical development.

Mental fitness impacts our capacity to make positive changes in our daily routines, whether eating healthy, being physically active, or living tobacco-free.

### Mental Fitness Needs

- **Autonomy:** "I am able to make choices about things that are important to me."
- **Relatedness:** "I feel included, supported and encouraged by others."
- **Competency:** "I have strengths and gifts that are recognized by myself and others."



Satisfaction of all three needs is associated with emotional well-being or resilience.

When mental fitness needs are not met, youth may be at a higher risk for experiencing difficulties related to their emotional, social and physical development.

### School Communities Can Make a Difference!

- Increase school connectedness by reaching out to involve students who do not feel part of the school.
- Emphasize fairness and social inclusion in the classroom and school-wide activities.
- Dedicate resources and programs to help peers learn how to support one another.
- Empower students to collaborate with peers to develop their own solutions for specific issues.
- Suspend judgment and encourage expression of students' thoughts and feelings.
- Provide opportunities for students to identify and use their strengths.
- Ensure a wide range of activities are offered and encourage students to participate in what interests them.
- Develop positive relationships with parents and community members.

# 2/3

of students experience a high level of mental fitness.

*This leads to increased connectedness to school, more pro-social behaviours (ie. sharing, helping others) and less oppositional behaviours.*



# 1/3

of students with lower mental fitness are of concern.

*These students tend to be less connected, less active, overweight, more susceptible to smoking, and exhibit more oppositional behaviours (ie. bullying, skipping classes).*

NOTE: When students seek help for school-related problems, they turn to friends most often, then parents and teachers.

# 71%

of students had parents who both encouraged and supported them to be active.

# 50%

of students report they typically spend more than 3 hours per day watching TV/movies or playing video/computer games



spend more than 3 hours per day on the phone, internet or texting.

*NOTE: Extracurricular activities, offered at school and outside of school, are important opportunities for physical activity.*

## Physical Activity

Active children tend to be active adults. 79% of Canadian youth are not active enough for optimal growth and development. Physical activity improves health and fitness, confidence and self-esteem, and is associated with decreased depression and anxiety. Physical inactivity is associated with an increased risk of chronic diseases and mental illness.



Students who are physically active at school tend to exhibit pro-social behaviours, have a better attitude towards school, are less likely to drop out, and have higher educational goals. Increasing physical activity can increase mental fitness. Likewise, addressing mental health issues can boost physical activity levels.

75% of teens girls and 69% of teens boys are NOT meeting the guidelines of 90 minutes of physical activity per day. (Canada's Physical Activity Guidelines were updated in January 2011 and now recommend a minimum of 60 minutes per day).

School is an important setting for physical activity. Students who participate in school-organized physical activities (46%) are more likely to be active.

Students felt positively about their school placing emphasis on developing self-esteem, positive attitudes about physical activity, and student participation in both recreational and competitive sport.

### School Communities Can Make a Difference!

- Integrate physical activity into other subjects and beyond physical education class.
- Invite students to play a leadership role in organizing physical activity events.
- Use small groups to decrease wait times during physical education classes.
- Encourage active transportation by providing a secure area to lock bikes/equipment.
- Make students aware of the time they spend being inactive and have them set goals to reduce sedentary behaviour.
- Recognize accomplishments, especially around participation.
- Encourage active adult role models.
- Find creative ways to involve inactive kids, like non-sport physical activity options (yoga, dance). Schools can work in partnerships with municipal, health and community agencies, and businesses to get our youth more active.

## Healthy Eating

Well-nourished youth are better prepared to learn, to be active, and to maintain their health into adulthood.



School, home and community settings can all promote healthy eating and make it easier for teens to make healthier choices.

Canadian youth are eating more high fat, sugary and salty foods, and sweetened drinks that provide few nutrients. As well, the majority do not eat enough servings of vegetables and fruits.

One quarter of students reported eating no vegetables or fruit, or not drinking 100% fruit or vegetable juice on the day prior to the survey.

Milk/soy beverages are good sources of vitamin D and calcium and contribute to bone growth during adolescence. 62% of the students drank at least 2 servings of milk or soy beverage the day before the survey while 37% had one serving or less.

Eating breakfast is linked to improved academic performance and behaviour at school as well as lower rates of obesity. Close to half of students ate breakfast daily during the school week while 11% did not eat it at all. Students reported lack of time, or not being hungry in the morning as the main reasons for not eating breakfast.

### School Communities Can Make a Difference!

- Engage local food producers with students and school food providers to learn about locally grown foods. Invite chefs to teach healthy cooking. Connect with gardeners and health professionals for opportunities to help improve food skills and influence food choices.
- Reinforce healthy eating lessons from the classroom by offering healthy food choices in school cafeterias, canteens, vending machines, fundraising, and at special events.
- Offer student breakfast, lunch or snack programs.
- Explore the many factors that influence food choices including advertising, media, friends, and family.



OVER **1/3**

of students reported eating high fat, salty or sugary snacks or drinks at **least 7 times the day** before the survey.

*These non-food group foods (including candy, baked sweets, frozen desserts, chips, cheesies, nachos, etc.) make up almost 1/4 of the caloric intake of Canadian teens.*



**51%**

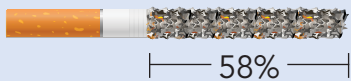
of students reported drinking 3 or more servings\* of sweetened non-nutritious beverages the day before the survey (includes regular pop, sports drinks, energy drinks, hot chocolate, etc.)

\* one serving equals one time

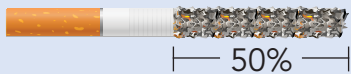
# 31%

of non-smoking students did not feel confident that they would be able to remain smoke-free in the future.

*Students who demonstrated a low level of mental fitness also showed a higher susceptibility to smoking than their peers at 40% low confidence at remaining smoke-free.*



In Thunder Bay & District, 58% of grade 12 students have tried smoking.



Compared to the provincial average of 50%.

## Tobacco Use

Tobacco use in high school is associated with a number of different outcomes for students. These include a decrease in academic achievement, and an increased risk of dropping out of high school (more so than marijuana or alcohol use).

Currently, 85% of current smokers start by the age of 19. The younger a person is when they begin to smoke, the more likely they are to become strongly addicted to nicotine.

Most established smokers begin experimenting with cigarettes between 10 and 18 years of age, pushing the importance of preventive education and support. Research shows that successful efforts to prevent smoking include education (curriculum), a supportive environment, and cessation services.



*Tobacco companies use candy-like flavours to market tobacco products (like cigarillos and chew) to youth. Youth under the age of 20 are 3 times more likely to use cigarillos than adults.*

### School Communities Can Make a Difference!

- Talk to students about smoking and tobacco use. Help them find ways to say 'no'.
- Avoid using tobacco products near children and youth.
- Work together to create a tobacco-free, pressure-free climate at your school.
- Support each other in choosing a tobacco-free life.
- Integrate tobacco-free messages into the curriculum.
- Adopt tobacco-free policies that create a supportive environment for both students and staff.
- Advocate for tobacco-free policies in extracurricular sports and activities.

## Healthy Body Weight

A healthy body weight is only one component of a well-balanced lifestyle. Physical activity and healthy eating are both key factors that influence a person's body weight.

Based on self-reported height and weight, 73% of students fall within the recommended healthy weight category while 24% of students are classified as overweight or obese. Overweight or obese youth are often stigmatized by peers and adults and may experience stress, have a poor body image, as well as poor self-esteem.

### School Communities Can Make a Difference!

- Teach about eating well with Canada's Food Guide, active living, positive body image, healthy relationships, and media literacy to encourage students to make healthier choices and deal with body image pressures.
- Create supportive environments for students of all shapes and sizes.
- Develop policies to make it easier to choose healthy foods and be active more often.
- Empower students to challenge our society's messages about weight, shape and dieting.

## Comprehensive School Health

Comprehensive School Health (CSH) is an international framework that helps us understand school health in a planned, integrated and holistic way. The health of students is affected not just by what happens in the classroom, but also by the whole school environment and beyond. Schools influence and are influenced by their broader community and cultural environments.

Using the four pillars from the CSH framework can support and enhance educational outcomes and the long-term health of youth.

### A healthy social and physical environment is reflected in:

- High quality relationships among and between staff and students in the school
- Emotional well-being of students
- Close relationships with families and the wider community
- Well-maintained buildings, grounds, play space and equipment in and surrounding the school
- Basic amenities such as sanitation and air cleanliness

### Effective teaching and learning is reflected in:

- Resources, activities and curriculum where students gain age-appropriate knowledge and experiences, helping to build the skill to improve their health and well-being

### Healthy school policy is reflected in:

- Management practices, decision-making process, rules, procedures and policies at all levels that promote health and well-being, and shape a respectful, welcoming and caring school environment

### Effective partnerships and services:

- Build close connections between schools and students' families
- Build supportive working relationships within schools (staff and students), between schools and other community organizations
- Encourage health, education and other sectors to work together to advance school health
- Include community and school-based services that support and promote student and staff health and well-being



## The Whole School Community Can Make a Difference!

The SHAPES report identifies areas of strengths to build on and concerns to address to improve the well-being of our teens. It will take the whole school community working together to make a difference.

### What school staff can do:

- Coordinate efforts with students, parents and community partners in problem solving and planning
- Deliver health, physical education and other related curricula
- Model healthy behaviours
- Advocate for new community programs or resources
- Support requests for funding (ie. grant programs)
- Enhance services or programs for students (e.g. counselling, school cafeteria)
- Advocate to make health a priority in school activities and curricula
- Enhance implementation of health policies
- Connect with your Healthy Schools Public Health Nurse (call 625-5972 or the local health unit office)

### What students can do:

- Take action through student-led groups
- Talk to teachers, administrators and community partners to help each other better understand the issues, seek solutions and create student-driven action plans
- Join a school-based action team or club dedicated to healthy living
- Organize new initiatives at school (e.g. intramural sports, awards for people who promote healthy living, healthy living challenges, health fairs)
- Share the data by writing articles for school and community newspapers, feature highlights on bulletin boards or during morning announcements, talk with family and friends, use it in school projects
- Connect with students from other schools to share ideas for action or explore partnership opportunities

### What parents and the community can do:

- Support the activities of school council, Home and School committees, parent council, etc. that support healthy living
- Model healthy behaviours at home
- Share skills, talents or resources
- Participate in an open house where community groups can share health and wellness programs
- Talk to teachers, administrators and students to help each other better understand the issues, seek solutions and create student driven action plans
- Engage other community partners to work with the whole school community on improving student wellness



Your Healthy Schools Public Health Nurse is here to help with ideas, resources and support for activities that promote health and wellness.

For more information, call your local health unit office.  
Find this report online at [TBDHU.COM](http://TBDHU.COM).

**625-5972**

in Thunder Bay

**1-888-294-6630**

in Thunder Bay District.