

SCHOOL BASED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAMS FOR THE PREVENTION OF OBESITY IN CHILDREN*

SUMMARY

Alongside building a healthy and balanced diet, the promotion of physical activity (PA) is the cornerstone of obesity prevention strategies. At the same time, schools enable universal reach and represent an ideal setting to target. We conducted a systematic search of the literature to examine the effects of interventions set in schools that targeted sedentary behaviours, PA, or physical fitness on primary prevention of obesity in 6- to 12-year-old children.

Based on 146 studies we found that school-based PA interventions produce small shifts at the population level that can incur significant public health benefits by reducing weight gain in healthy weight children. Equally, these programmes appear to be very safe, with low injury rates being reported.

The most effective approach includes combining episodes of PA with educational content to increase knowledge and change attitudes about PA. Programmes that span over at least one year, include a diet component, involve parents, improve physical fitness, and extend to the home and community setting appear to be the most promising approach. However, raising awareness about the downsides of sedentary behaviour in addition to promoting PA does not provide additional benefits for obesity prevention.

Nevertheless, given the unprecedented increase in exposure to screens faced by children, it is of paramount importance to **invest in new, more effective strategies for controlling the time children spend in front of screens.** Preliminary evidence points to some inequalities, i.e., lower effectiveness of school based physical activity programs in the prevention of obesity among socially deprived children. Still, as parents of this group of children are very hard to reach, **schools should be a focus of public health policies aimed at reducing health inequalities.**

*Practice abstract also available in Croatian on the EIP-Agri website



Science and Technology in
childhood Obesity Policy

For more information, visit www.stopchildobesity.eu

The STOP project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 774548. The content of this document reflects only the authors' views and the European Commission is not liable for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

