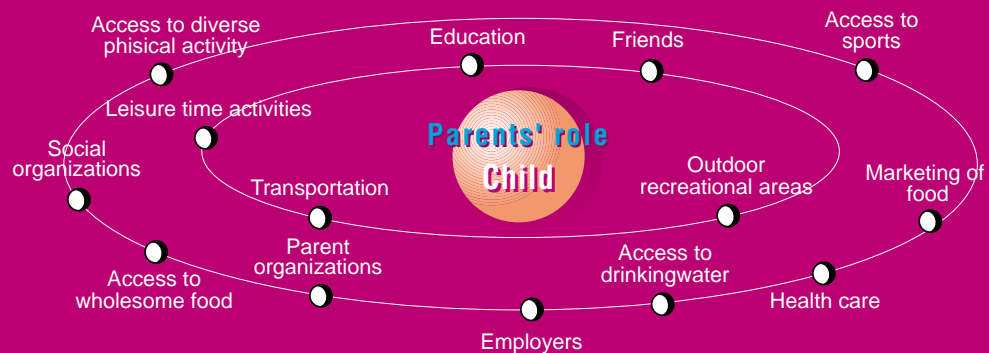


Several factors influencing the well-being and health of children



Innumerable factors affect people's health and lifestyle. This figure pulls together several aspects affecting the diet and physical activity of children and young people.



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PHYSICAL ACTIVITY,

GOOD NUTRITION,

OBVIOUS RESULTS

Everything affects us,
especially ourselves!

Municipalities and the Public Health Institute of Iceland are joining hands to promote increased physical activity and better diets for children.

Physical activity and good nutrition are necessary for children. Both affect their mental and physical well-being and are important for children's development and the quality of their play and work. On the other hand, in recent decades children's lifestyle has changed. Daily sitting in front of televisions and computers has replaced playing outdoors, and, at the same time, the consumption of sweet beverages and all kinds of snack food has greatly increased. A great deal has been discussed and written about this trend in Iceland as well as elsewhere, but now is the time for action! The Public Health Institute of Iceland is therefore seeking collaboration with the municipalities in Iceland to improve the lifestyle of children and families and their possibilities for outdoor recreation and good nutrition.

Cooperation is the keyword

The circumstances of children and youths are shaped by society as a whole; there are few exceptions to this. If the plan is to improve the lifestyle of young people, cooperation is the keyword. In this respect, school and other educational institutions, the healthcare service, sports and youth programmes, the economy and social organisations play an important role, not to mention the family itself.

Everything affects us, especially ourselves!

is a mutual development project of the Public Health Institute of Iceland and the municipalities. It will begin formally at the start of 2005; the first part of the project will conclude two years later and the

second part after six years. At the end of this period, plans call for the work to be firmly established.

Who does what?

The municipalities participating in the project formulate their own policy and action plans for increasing physical activity and improving nutrition for children in their home areas in accordance with their own needs and circumstances. It can therefore be assumed that the projects will be different, regarding both the approach and the scope, depending on the emphases of each and every one concerned. The Public Health Institute of Iceland is involved in the project through consultation and instruction and will evaluate the results of the project in each location.

Municipalities' role

Each municipality formulates its own policy and action plan regarding children's lifestyle, with emphasis on increased physical activity and improved diet. The approach can differ in accordance with different circumstances in municipalities. Therefore, only several examples of important aspects will be mentioned.

- Facilities and availability of diverse physical activity for all children in and outside of schools, taking into consideration different needs and interests.
- Opportunities for more physical activity during school. Emphasis on fulfilling the curriculum requirement of three hours of physical activity per week. More hours added to the schedule where physical activity during recess and breaks will be encouraged.
- Efforts made to increase the number of organized physical activity periods in pre-schools.
- Physical education classes taking different needs and interests into account shall be given increased weight in schooling.
- Good outdoor recreational areas, sports areas,

walking and biking paths nearby the school and homes.

- Encouragement of families to engage in physical activity together.
- A good school cafeteria where healthy food and beverages are made available to all children at lunchtime.
- Availability of wholesome food and drink, including vegetables and fruits, in schools and leisure activity programs.
- Instruction and motivation for parents and children regarding a wholesome lifestyle.
- Curriculum requirements regarding instruction and nutrition and food preparation in compulsory schools shall be followed.
- Health care, school, the economy, sports associations, leisure-time centres and other voluntary associations encouraged to collaborate and participate in the project.

Public Health Institute of Iceland's role

Jórlaug Heimisdóttir is the project manager of Everything affects us, especially ourselves! under the auspices of the Public Health Institute of Iceland. She supervises the project, works on its build-up and is the contact person for the municipalities. The project manager has the support of an interdisciplinary council, which provides consultancy and support in accordance with the wishes of each municipality. The Public Health Institute of Iceland organises courses for interested parties and holds joint meetings with municipalities. The centre's home page, www.publikealth.is, will provide a communications network for the project.

The Public Health Institute of Iceland, which is preparing to publicize the project throughout Iceland, will sponsor various kinds of events and publish instructional materials. The goal is to familiarize as many Icelanders as possible with the project, make

them aware of its importance and encourage their participation in its implementation.

Evaluation of results

The Public Health Institute of Iceland will check the results of the project by doing an initial status assessment and follow-up evaluations after two and six years. The research will have two parts:

Schooling-related matters

Questionnaires will be sent to school administrators emphasizing the following elements:

- Availability of physical activity and sports at the school and the degree of students' participation.
- Availability of food in schools, wholesomeness of the food and the degree to which students eat the food offered by the school
- Instruction on healthy lifestyle in schools for students and parents.
- Environment of schools, walking and biking paths, instructions from the schools on modes of travel to and from school.
- Schools' instructions about sack/box lunches.

Matters related to children and families

Survey of health-related lifestyles of children and youths, aged 11, 13 and 15.

- Mental well-being of the child
- Physical well-being of the child
- Food habits and utilisation of the school cafeteria
- Child's leisure time habits with the family and friends
- Attitudes toward leisure time, games and sports.
- Mode of travel to and from school

The height and weight of children will then be obtained from the school nurse's files and related to the previously mentioned points.