

## **Obesity on the Rise among School Children in Urban India**

**The 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition of the EduSports School Health and Fitness Survey covering 49000+ children from over 100 schools revealed that school going children across the country are headed for an unhealthy and unfit adult life as they possess poor body strength, poor flexibility and have undesirable BMI (Body Mass Index) scores.**

- ✓ An overwhelming 39.2% of school going children do not possess the right BMI levels; with almost 20% of children showing signs of obesity
- ✓ Fitness levels drop sharply as children grow older, with an alarming increase in obesity seen in the age group of 10 to 13 years
- ✓ Lifestyles in urban India culpable for obesity and poor health as one in four children from the metros are overweight, as compared to only one in six children in the non-metros. Children in non-metros not only possessed better health levels (measured by BMI) than their metro counterparts, but also displayed better overall fitness levels (better flexibility and body strength)
- ✓ Overall, one of every two school going children in India are not fit enough to compete in sports – as they do not possess the desired levels of flexibility, body strength or explosive power
- ✓ Planned and systematic interventions in schools (of including 2-4 weekly structured play sessions) resulted in an improvement in the overall fitness levels

**Bangalore:** The biggest worry that parents and school leaders have today- The fear of having an unfit generation of children at homes and in schools has come to the fore with the findings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the EduSports School Health and Fitness Survey. The survey is the country's only and most comprehensive survey on the health and fitness of Urban India's school going children. The annual study, undertaken by EduSports, India's largest school sports and physical education company, covered 49046 children in the age group 7 to 17 years from 104 schools in 54 cities across 18 states. The assessments were done in the academic year 2011-12 and covered 7 basic fitness indicators. The fitness indicators included endurance, anaerobic capacity/explosive power, flexibility, body strength (upper, lower, abdominal) and BMI.

### **Fitness levels drop and obesity on the rise as children grow older with the incidence of obesity higher in the metros**

While the problem of low fitness levels is equally prevalent among boys and girls, fitness levels fall and obesity is on the rise as children grow older. Children in the age group 10-13 years had higher incidence of overweight/obese BMI compared to the other children in the sample (22.84% overweight or obese vs. 18.6% among other children). They also displayed lower levels of flexibility (54.3% scored low on the flexibility test vs. 47.9% over the sample) and lower body strength (58.9% scored low on lower body strength vs. 50.7% over the sample).

Geographically, children in the non-metros (17775 children in 46 non-metro cities and towns) performed better across different fitness parameters compared to their counterparts in the metros (9688 children in the 8 cities of Delhi/NCR, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chandigarh, Kolkata, Pune and Ahmedabad). One out of four children in the metros is overweight (24.9% obese or overweight) compared to one out of six children in the non-metros (16.6% obese or overweight). Additionally, children in non-metros also demonstrated better anaerobic capacities (30.2% of children in non-metros and 26.5% of children in metros had good anaerobic capacity) and flexibility (31.1% of children in non-metros and 26.7% children in metros had good body flexibility)

**A higher incidence of obesity is observed among children from the northern states** (Punjab, Delhi / NCR, Rajasthan, UP and Haryana) as 24% of this group possesses high BMIs as against the national average of 19.9%.

Low fitness levels coupled with the lack of basic skills to play sports, unhealthy eating habits (junk and processed foods) and the sedentary options available for children to entertain themselves (television, internet and video games) puts an entire generation of children at a risk of growing up to become unhealthy and inactive adults.

### **Low levels anaerobic capacities, body strengths and flexibility among young children: Making them unfit to compete in sports**

Even as a majority of the children are able to walk or run non-stop for five minutes, displaying acceptable levels of endurance, almost 40% do not have the anaerobic capacity i.e. the fitness level to perform well in events like sprinting that require them to have great performance in short bursts of time. Nearly one in two children covered under the study have poor flexibility levels and body strength making them unsuitable for most sports. (49.9% have low flexibility, 42% have low abdominal strength, 65% do not have enough explosive power in their upper bodies and 54% do not have enough strength in their lower bodies).

The 27463 boys and the 21583 girls who were assessed as a part of the study showed similar levels of fitness with the girls scoring marginally better in overall BMI (63.9% girls are fit vs. 58.2% for boys) and flexibility levels. The boys perform marginally better than the girls across the other tests that involve use of strength and power.

### **Lack of infrastructure to play is not the primary reason behind falling fitness levels**

While efforts to build infrastructure in and outside of schools to get children to play must be encouraged, the results from the study suggests that it is not the infrastructure but what actually happens with that infrastructure that is critical to building a fitter and healthier generation of children. Children from a subset of 9 schools (in the overall sample of 104 schools) that did not have the sufficient infrastructure did equally well (no significant pattern observed in the data) compared to schools that had sufficient infrastructure for children to play.

### **Planned and systematic interventions backed by a structured inclusive sports curriculum results in better fitness levels among children in schools**

A controlled study involving a total of 36146 children from 93 schools in 47 cities strengthened the belief that planned and systematic interventions at a school level could go a long way in helping children become fitter and healthier. The children were exposed to 2-4 weekly sessions\* of structured sports/physical activity which resulted in a marked improvement in their fitness levels (ranging from 4% improvement in BMI, flexibility and anaerobic capacity to a heartening 15% improvement in their body strength).

Speaking on the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of this landmark survey, Mr. Saumil Majmudar, CEO & Co-founder, EduSports, said "It is truly disheartening to see health and fitness, which we as children took for granted a couple of decades ago, are now deficient among today's children. It is only natural for kids to move away from an activity that they do not possess the fitness or skill level to engage in. If kids are unable to run or jump for long, they will be happy to settle on the sofa! At the same time, it has been proved, with just 2-3 hours of a focused physical education programme a week, it is possible to effect a small but significant change. It is time that the focus of sports in schools moved from mere competition among the best, to include all children with a special focus on children in primary school (who are neglected the most). PE sessions will then become enjoyable for children and skills and fitness will follow".

### **About EduSports:**

Winner of a number of industry awards (NDTV- Marks for Sports 'Spirit of Sports' 2012 and Sankalp Awards 2012 for education and vocational training), EduSports is India's first and largest Physical Education (PE) & School Sports enterprise. EduSports partners with schools across the country to help them develop healthier and fitter children via the medium of sports/physical activity. EduSports designs and administers a sports curriculum for K-12 schools. The EduSports school sports programme has been designed by a distinguished panel of advisors comprising of leading sports psychologists, educationists, and sports professionals with vast experience of working with K-12 schools. Currently EduSports is working with over 220 schools and covers more than 150,000 children across 70 cities all over India. More information about EduSports can be had at [www.edusports.in](http://www.edusports.in).

\*These sessions were delivered as a part of the inclusive and age-appropriate EduSports SOAR programme