

## SWEDEN: Mental health in schools

By Marie Harding, national SHE-coordinator in Sweden

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The Public Health Agency of Sweden has a national responsibility for public health issues and works to ensure good public health. The agency also works to ensure that the population is protected against communicable diseases and other health threats.

Our vision statement: a public health that strengthens the positive development of society.

In a report PUBLISHED APRIL 21, 2021, School children who are physically active experience better mental health.

Physically active school children are more satisfied with life and have less mental problems. It shows a new report from the Swedish Public Health Agency.

An earlier report from the authority shows that school children who are physically active feel less stressed by school work and have better general health. The Swedish Public Health Agency has now also investigated the connection between school children's physical activity and their mental health.

The new results show that physical activity is linked to mental health. The more physically active the school children are, the more satisfied they are with life. Children who are more physically active also report less problems with depression, irritation, nervousness and sleep problems, compared to children who are less physically active.

- These are important results, seen in the light of the fact that more and more school children report mental health problems and the average life satisfaction decreases, while the majority move too little. These problems are also more common among girls than boys and most common among those with poorer socio-economic conditions, says investigator Solveig Petersen, at the Swedish Public Health Agency.

The report cannot provide an answer as to what is the cause and effect behind the connections, but there are several possible explanations for the fact that physical activity could lead to mental well-being and minor mental problems. The results thus indicate that physical activity is important for school children's mental health.

The ongoing pandemic poses additional challenges for children and young people's mental health and for their opportunities for physical activity.

- Thus, it is important to work actively to give all children the conditions to be physically active and experience the joy of movement, regardless of gender and socio-economic background. Here, the school is an important arena, says Marita Friberg, investigator at the Public Health Agency.

### **About the survey**

The survey is based on a national sample of 11-, 13-, and 15-year-olds in Sweden who wore activity meters for a week and also completed a questionnaire. The work is a sub-survey in the Swedish Public Health Agency's national survey School children's health habits.

## Read more

- School children who are physically active report better mental health
- Children and young people's movement patterns

Source: <https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/nyheter-och-press/nyhetsarkiv/2021/april/skolbarn-som-ar-fysiskt-aktiva-upplever-battre-psykisk-halsa/>

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Pep report 2021 - The corona pandemic has negatively affected our children's health

Every year, Generation Pep publishes the Pep report, an annual national survey of children and young people's physical health. More than 8,000 children aged 4-17 have been asked questions about their lifestyles. The Pep report for 2021 has now been released and this year's report shows that the ongoing corona pandemic has had a negative effect on the mental health of children and young people. The report also shows that the "lifestyle pandemic" - where we have become increasingly inactive for a long time and eat too little of what the body needs - does not tend to stop. Many children and young people have been affected psychologically and 3 out of 10 have felt anxiety during the pandemic

In the Pep report 2021, we can see that:

1 in 5 children answer that they moved less during the pandemic and almost 1 in 3 answer that they had more screen time during the pandemic. Among high school students, 3 out of 10 experience that they have been less physically active.

Only 2 out of 10 children reach the recommended amount of physical activity. Girls reach the recommendation to a lesser extent than boys, already from the age of seven girls are less active.

1 out of 10 children has five hours or more sedentary screen time. The teenagers have the most screen time - 30 percent spend five hours more than the screen outside school hours.

44 percent of teenagers sleep less than the recommended 8-9 hour per day.

Only 1 in 10 children live a healthy life, ie move the sufficient amount and eat healthy in accordance to WHO's recommendations.

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Marie Harding is project leader of the Swedish national project Generation Pep.

<https://generationpep.se/sv/andra-sprak/in-english/> (website in English)

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