PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SEDENTARY BEHAVIOR

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that children and adolescents get 1 hour or more of physical activity every day, most of which should be moderate- to vigorous-intensity aerobic activity.[1] Data from the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System showed that 27.1 percent of high school students were physically active for at least 60 minutes on each of the 7 previous days (figure 1).

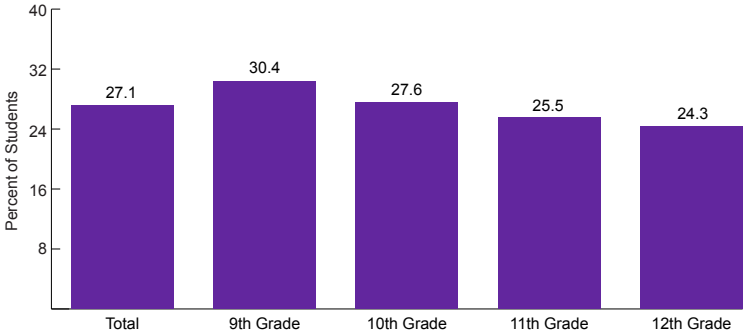
Achievement of recommended levels of physical activity varied by both sex and grade level. Among high school students in all grades, a smaller proportion of females reported 60 minutes of physical activity on each of the previous 7 days than males (17.7 versus 36.6 percent, respectively). Students in the 9th grade were more likely to achieve the recommended level of physical activity than those in the 12th grade (30.4 versus 24.3 percent, respectively). With regard to race and ethnicity, 21.8 percent of non-Hispanic Asian students reported recommended levels of physical activity, compared to 28.2 percent of non-Hispanic Whites.

In conjunction with physical activity, experts recommend limiting sedentary behaviors. Specifically, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents limit children's media time to 1–2 hours per day.[2] This includes time spent watching TV or videos as well as time spent playing video or computer games. In 2013, 32.5 percent of high school students reported watching 3 or more hours of television per day on an average school day. There was no difference in the proportion of males and females who reported this level of television watching. However, students in 9th grade were slightly more likely to watch 3 or more hours of television than students in 12th grade (34.9 versus 31.3 percent, respectively).

The proportion of students who reported 3 or more hours of television watching varied significantly by race and ethnicity (figure 2). More than half of non-Hispanic Black students (53.7 percent) reported this level of television viewing, while the same was true for about one-quarter of non-Hispanic White and Asian students (25.0 and 24.5 percent, respectively) and more than one-third of Hispanic students (37.8 percent).

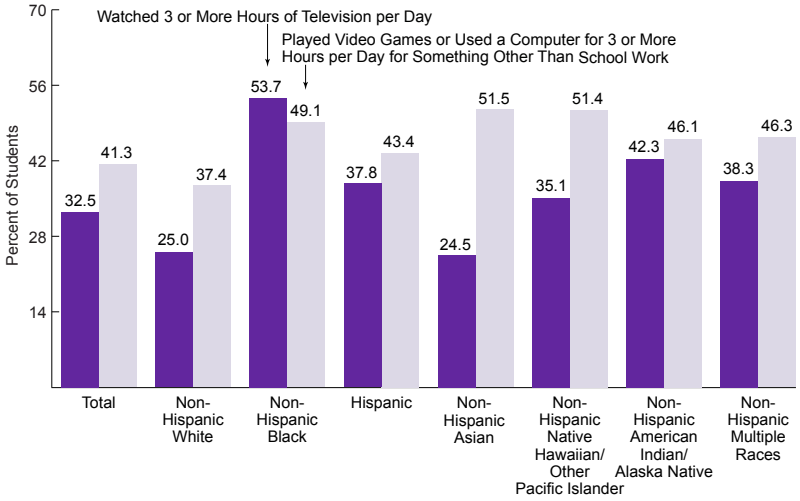
In the same year, 41.3 percent of high school students reported playing video games or using computers for something other than school work, such as computer games, for 3 or more hours per day on an average school day. The proportion varied by grade level, as 9th-grade students were more likely to engage in this behavior than those in 12th grade (44.8 versus 36.9 percent, respectively). These activities varied by race and ethnicity, with non-Hispanic Asian (51.5 percent) and non-Hispanic Black students (49.1 percent) more likely to report this level of video game and computer use than non-Hispanic White students (37.4 percent).

Figure 1. Physical Activity* Among High School Students, by Grade, 2013



**Defined as physical activity that increased their heart rate and made them breathe hard some of the time for a total of at least 60 minutes on each of the last 7 days.*

Figure 2. Sedentary Behavior in the Past Week Among High School Students, by Race/Ethnicity, 2013



Data Sources

Figure 1 and 2. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey. Available at: http://nccd.cdc.gov/YouthOnline. Accessed September 20, 2014.

Endnotes

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. Available at: http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/guidelines/. Accessed September 2, 2014.
2. Committee on Public Education. Children, adolescents, and television. *Pediatrics*. 2001;107(2):423–426.

Suggested Citation

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