HRSA Maternal & Child Health

National Survey of Children's Health

Youth Sports Participation, 2023 – 2024

Data Brief | July 2026

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ABOUT THE NSCH

The Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB) funds and directs the **National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH)**, which the U.S. Census Bureau conducts.

The NSCH is the largest national- and state-level survey on the health and health care needs of children ages 0 – 17, their families, and their communities.

It is an annual household survey completed by a parent or guardian, either by web or paper/pencil.

SELECT CONTENT

- Health conditions and functional difficulties
- Social and emotional well-being
- Consumption of fruits and vegetables
- Consumption of sugary drinks
- Eating and weight-related behaviors
- Health care access and use
- School environment and engagement
- Neighborhood amenities for physical activity

STATE OVERSAMPLES

Oversampling increases the number of households sampled and surveys completed to enable detailed analysis of specific populations, such as regions within a state or children with special health care needs. In 2023 — 2024, 15 states and 1 metropolitan area sponsored oversamples.

MORE INFORMATION

Access the most recent **data and supporting materials**.

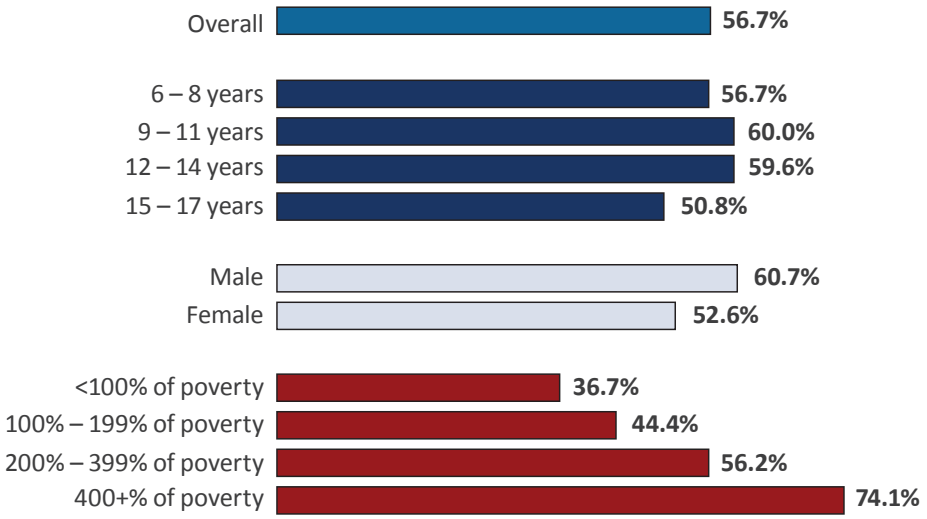
Playing organized sports, such as participating in a sports team or taking sports lessons, provides an opportunity for youth to meet recommended physical activity levels and improve their health. Current **physical activity guidelines** recommend that youth ages 6 – 17 get at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily.

Regular physical activity is associated with improved **health outcomes** among youth. Increasing participation in organized sports may help more youth meet physical activity recommendations with physical, mental, and social-emotional **health benefits**. This data brief describes participation in youth sports and the relationship between sports and physical activity, healthy behaviors, and health conditions.

Youth Sports Participation

- In 2023 – 2024, 56.7% of youth ages 6 – 17 participated in a sports team or lessons after school or on weekends in the past year ("youth sports"), representing almost 28 million youth.
- Participation in youth sports differed by age. Participation was highest among youth 9 – 11 years (60.0%) and 12 – 14 years (59.6%) followed by youth 6 – 8 years (56.7%) and 15 – 17 years (50.8%).
- A higher percentage of boys (60.7%) than girls (52.6%) participated in youth sports.
- Participation in youth sports increased with family income, ranging from 36.7% of youth in families at less than 100% of the poverty threshold to 74.1% of youth in families at 400% or more of the poverty threshold.

Sports Participation Among Youth Ages 6 – 17, by Age, Sex, and Family Income,* 2023 – 2024



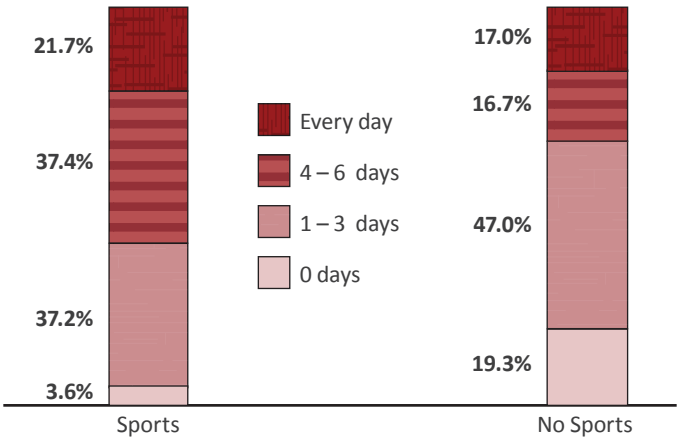
*Ratio of income in the past year to **poverty thresholds**. In 2023, the poverty threshold for a family of four with two children was $30,900.

Youth Sports Participation and Physical Activity

In 2023 – 2024, among youth ages 6 – 17, those who participated in sports were more likely than those who did not participate to be physically active most days of the week.

- Youth who participated in sports were more likely to meet physical activity guidelines of at least 60 minutes every day compared with youth who did not participate in sports (21.7% vs. 17.0%).
- Youth who participated in sports were also more likely to be physically active for at least 60 minutes 4 – 6 days of the week (37.4% vs. 16.7%).

60+ Minutes/Day of Physical Activity in the Past Week by Sports Participation Among Youth Ages 6 – 17, 2023 – 2024

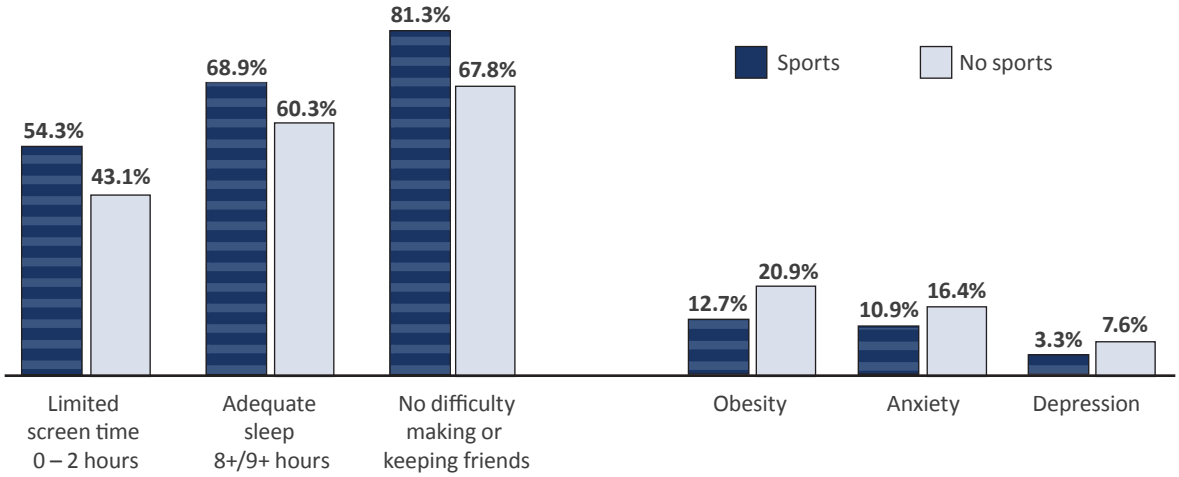


Youth Sports Participation, Healthy Behaviors, and Health Conditions

In 2023 – 2024, healthy behaviors were more common and health conditions were less common among youth who participated in sports compared with those who did not participate. However, it is important to note that cross-sectional data cannot establish the direction of relationships or causality (for example, sports participation may be lower because of having a health condition).

- Youth who participated in sports were more likely to engage in healthy behaviors compared with those who did not participate in sports.
  - Compared with youth who did not participate in sports, a higher percentage of youth who participated in sports had limited screen time, defined as 2 hours or less per weekday, excluding schoolwork (54.3% vs. 43.1%).
  - A higher percentage of youth who participated in sports got adequate sleep on most weeknights, defined as 9 hours or more for youth ages 6 – 12 and 8 hours or more for youth ages 13 – 17, compared with those who did not participate (68.9% vs. 60.3%).
  - Youth who participated in sports were also more likely than those who did not participate to have no difficulty making or keeping friends (81.3% vs. 67.8%).
- Youth who participated in sports were less likely to have certain health conditions compared with those who did not participate in sports.
  - A lower percentage of youth who participated in sports had obesity compared with those who did not participate (12.7% vs. 20.9%).
  - Youth who participated in sports were less likely than those who did not participate to have a current anxiety diagnosis (10.9% vs. 16.4%) or current depression diagnosis (3.3% vs. 7.6%).

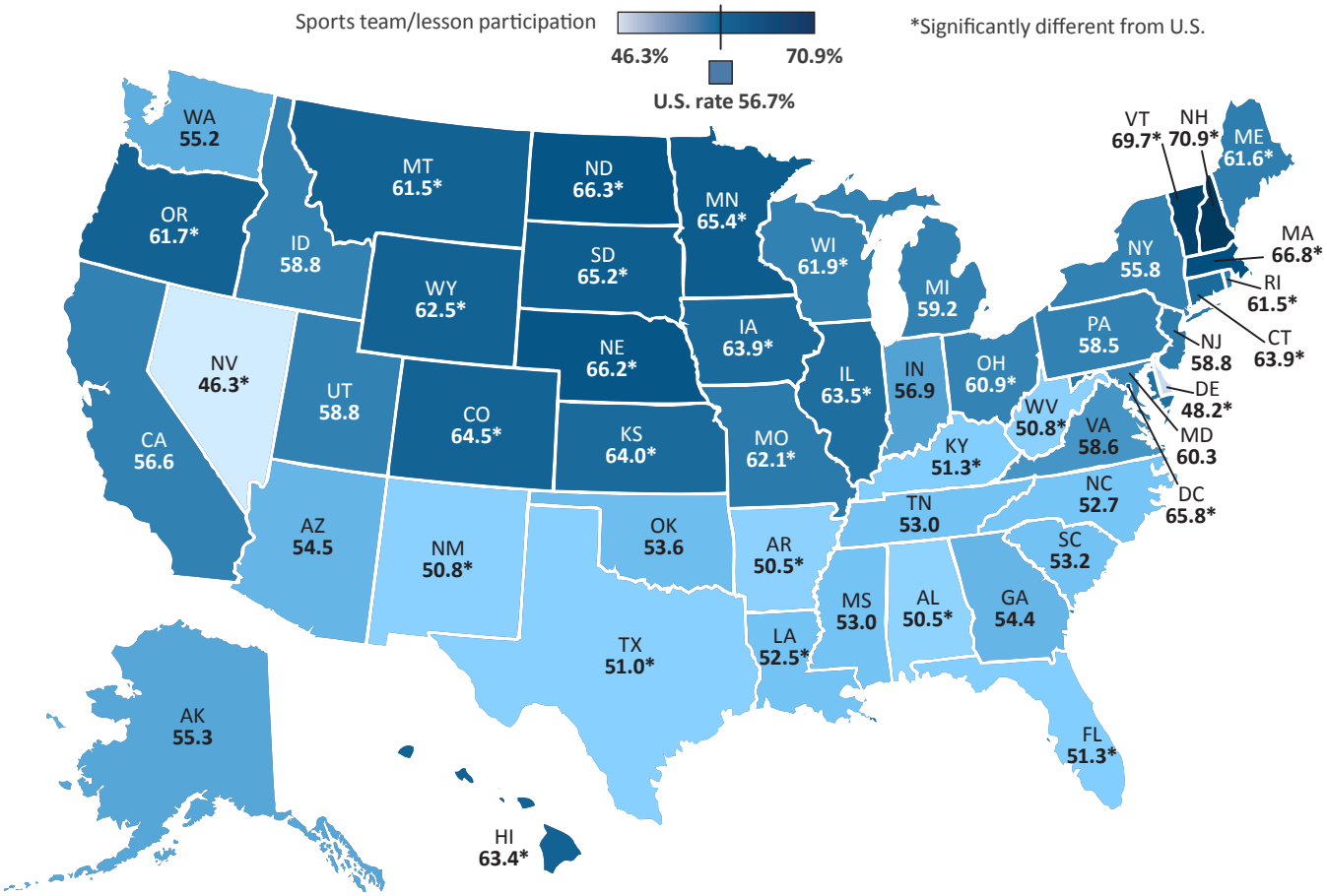
Healthy Behaviors and Health Conditions by Sports Participation Among Youth Ages 6 – 17, 2023 – 2024



Youth Sports Participation by State

- In 2023 – 2024, youth participation in a sports team or lessons varied by 24.6 percentage points across states, from a low of 46.3% in Nevada to a high of 70.9% in New Hampshire.
- Compared with the U.S. overall, 22 states had significantly higher youth sports participation (New Hampshire 70.9%, Vermont 69.7%, Massachusetts 66.8%, North Dakota 66.3%, Nebraska 66.2%, District of Columbia 65.8%, Minnesota 65.4%, South Dakota 65.2%, Colorado 64.5%, Kansas 64.0%, Connecticut 63.9%, Iowa 63.9%, Illinois 63.5%, Hawaii 63.4%, Wyoming 62.5%, Missouri 62.1%, Wisconsin 61.9%, Oregon 61.7%, Maine 61.6%, Montana 61.5%, Rhode Island 61.5%, and Ohio 60.9%).
- Ten states had significantly lower youth sports participation than the U.S. overall (Nevada 46.3%, Delaware 48.2%, Alabama 50.5%, Arkansas 50.5%, New Mexico 50.8%, West Virginia 50.8%, Texas 51.0%, Florida 51.3%, Kentucky 51.3%, and Louisiana 52.5%).

Sports Participation Among Youth Ages 6 – 17 by State, 2023 – 2024



DATA NOTES

In 2023 – 2024, parents/caregivers completed questionnaires for 106,537 children ages 0 – 17, including 71,172 youth ages 6 – 17. Estimates presented in this brief are weighted to represent children living in U.S. households. Unless otherwise noted, described differences between estimates are statistically significant using two-sided tests ($p<0.05$). Combining multiple years of data enables more reliable estimates, especially for smaller populations or state-level estimates. Statistical significance for state-level estimates is influenced by the prevalence and precision of estimates, states that oversampled have a larger sample size and more precise estimates. For further information on the design, operation, and analysis of the NSCH, please see available **Technical Documentation**.