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Special points of interest:

- Saskatchewan rural youth rate their health more poorly than Canadian youth
- More male youth rate their health as excellent
- Self assessment of health is highest for rural youth with healthy lifestyles
- Excellent health is positively related to all measures of physical activity

The Health of Rural Youth

One of the two critical periods of child development is during the adolescent years when youth are becoming increasingly independent. Adolescents are often faced with tremendous pressure to engage in activities and behaviours that could have serious and potentially lasting implications (e.g. unprotected sex, alcohol and drug use). How youth respond to these challenges is influenced by the individual's sense of values, knowledge and societal expectations (Health Canada 1999).

CCSD (2006) report some very positive trends for Canadian youth, including declining death rates, smoking rates and unintended pregnancy rates. On the other hand there are also some health trends that give cause for concern including lower rates of physical activity, and higher rates of obesity, asthma, and sexually transmitted infections.

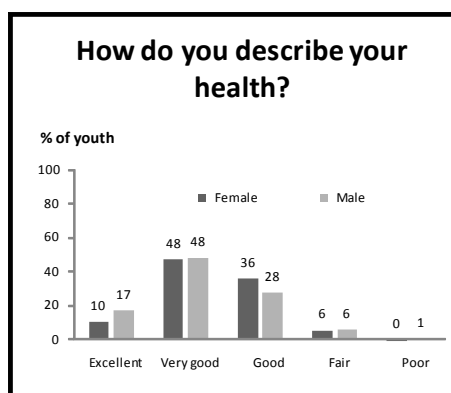
Most rural youth describe their health as good or better

Canadian youths' assessment of their own health has declined since 1998 (CCSD 2006). In 2005, 67.4% of Canadian youth aged 12 to 19 said they were in very good or excellent health, lower than the rates in 1998 (Statistics Canada 2006).

In this study of Saskatchewan rural youth, 61% of youth described their health as very good or excellent, lower than the rates for Canadian youth in 2005. There is no significant difference in how rural youth of different ages describe their health.



Male youth rate their health as better than female youth



There is a significant difference between female and male youth in their assessments of their health. Male youth rate their health as better than female youth, in particular 7% more male youth describe their health as excellent.

In the Canadian data, young girls aged 12 to 14 were slightly more likely than boys to say that they were in very good or excellent health (68% compared to 66% for boys), while male youth 15 to 19 gave higher ratings of their health than their female peers (Statistics Canada 2006).

Very few youth reported that they were in fair or poor health.

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Saskatchewan Rural Youth Healthy Lifestyles and Risk Behaviour Study

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Views, conclusions, and recommendations in this fact sheet do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the organizations or agencies sponsoring or contributing to the research in various ways.

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If you use information from these fact sheets please reference it in the following way:

Martz, D. and A. Wagner (2008) Saskatchewan Rural Youth Healthy Lifestyles and Risk Behaviour Project Fact Sheet. (Health Canada DSCIF Study #6558-08-2005/3480566). Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan.

Self reported health is positively related to healthy lifestyles

"Health practices are learned within the context of family, community and society — beginning at an early age and continuing through the transition from primary school and puberty to secondary school and the work force. Parents' modelling of behaviours such as smoking and physical activity can influence the adoption of these behaviours by their children. Societal values and attitudes influence health behaviours and choices, as do social and emotional support from families, friends and communities" (Health Canada 1999)

- Rural youth who described themselves as underweight or the right weight were more likely to rate their health highly.
- The more time youth spend on physical activity, the more likely they are to rate their health as excellent or very good.
- Youth who noted that they had felt sad to the extent that it affected their activities were more likely to rate their health more poorly.
- Youth who had considered suicide rated their health more poorly.
- Youth who smoked or had tried smoking rated their health as poorer compared to those who had not tried smoking.
- Self rated health declines with the number of days youth smoke in a month.
- Youth who report higher levels of drinking, drinking on more occasions or binge drinking rate their health more poorly.
- Youth who smoked marijuana tend to rate their health as poorer when compared to those who have never used the drug.
- Youth with more healthy eating habits who ate more fruit, vegetables, green salad, carrots and drank more fruit juice and milk tended to rate their health as better.