

Background and Documentation

for the

2001 California Children's Healthy Eating and Exercise Practices Survey

California Department of Health Services

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Introduction

The *California Children's Healthy Eating and Exercise Practices Survey (CalCHEEPS)* is the most comprehensive survey of child dietary intake and physical activity in the state. It also captures vital information about factors influencing these behaviors.

CalCHEEPS was developed to fill a gap in the nutrition surveillance of California children. Statewide, there were no population-based, representative surveys of diet and activity for children in the upper elementary school grades. This resulted in a lack of information to guide the development and refinement of State programs, including the *California Children's 5 a Day—Power Play! Campaign*.

The survey was developed in 1998, commenced in 1999, and continues to be administered biennially in odd years. It was designed to gain a better understanding of California children's dietary intake (especially fruit and vegetable consumption) and practices, physical activity, sedentary practices, knowledge and awareness of the *California Children's 5 a Day—Power Play! Campaign*, and factors that influence these behaviors including out-of-home eating, social norms, school environment, poverty status, weight status as well as knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs.

CalCHEEPS is a statewide surveillance project of the California Department of Health Services directed by the Cancer Prevention and Nutrition Section. It is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture's Food Stamp Program, The California Endowment, and the California Department of Food and Agriculture and administered by the Public Health Institute.

Sample and Methods

In April of 2001, a food diary was mailed to a demographically balanced sample of 2,143 households with 9- to 11-year-old children whose households were registered with an ongoing market research panel. Parental permission was secured for all participants. Parents were asked to assist their child in keeping a diary of foods that the child ate and the physical activities the child undertook on two consecutive school days. For the dietary portion of the survey, families recorded the types and number of servings of eight key food groups including fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads and higher fiber cereal, dry beans, milk products, protein rich foods, soda and sweetened beverages, high-fat snacks, and sweets. These foods were reported for each of six daily eating occasions. Serving size was semi-quantified. A small gift (e.g., pen, pencil, beach ball, Frisbee, etc.) was provided to those who completed and returned the diary. These households were also entered into a raffle to win 1 of 14 Toys "R" Us gift certificates ranging from \$25 to \$100.

By the July 3, 2001 deadline, 754 children completed this part of the survey. The sampling error was ± 5 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. A sub-sample of 369 children took part in a follow-up, non-assisted telephone survey on their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about healthful eating and physical activity. The response rate was 35 percent for the diary and 53 percent of diary respondents were interviewed for the telephone survey that followed.

Of the 2,143 qualifying households in the panel, the white sample was comparable to that from the 2000 Current Population Survey (CPS) of California in terms of parent's age, household income, and household size. However, heads of households in the minority samples tended to be younger than the CPS sample, and the panel underrepresented Hispanic and Asian households. In addition, survey respondents were more likely to have heads of households that were married, white, college educated, and more affluent than those who declined participation. To address these issues, the mail and telephone survey results were weighted to reflect the CPS findings for households with 9- to 11-year-old children based on race/ethnicity, household income, and number of 9- to 11-year-old children in the household.

The 754 participants were almost evenly divided between boys and girls. Forty-three percent were white, 38 percent Latino, 6 percent African-American, and 12 percent Asian/other.¹ Most children were in the fourth or fifth grades. Almost

¹ Asian, Pacific Islander, and other children (N = 44) were collapsed due to the small sample sizes for each group.

nine out of ten children attended public school, and 2 percent were home-schooled. Thirteen percent of the children came from households with less than a \$20,000 a year income, and 48 percent came from households with an annual income of \$50,000 or more. One in ten children lived in households receiving Food Stamps.

The 2001 *CaICHEEPS* data tables provide bivariate relationships unadjusted for any other variables.

Changes in question wording between survey years (e.g., from 1999 to 2001) are indicated with red font at the top of each data table. Red font and strikethrough are used to show deleted words. Red font alone designates added words.

Limitations

There are limitations on generalizing from this survey. While the response rate was well within the range expected for a parent-assisted mail survey of children, it was lower than that of other self-administered mail surveys, such as those conducted with employees and customers (e.g., respondents with a vested interest). Second, these respondents are a "best-case" sample. As a market-research panel, the children lived in stable households that were interested in research and willing to complete the food and exercise diaries. Third, during weekdays children's schedules are more structured and as a result dietary choices tend to be lower in snacks and fast foods. [1], [2] Fourth, market-research panels tend to under represent African Americans and households with extremely low or high incomes. Finally, all households were English-speaking. These factors could favor higher fruit and vegetable consumption.

In contrast, the time of year was not ideal for fruit and vegetable consumption because the diaries were collected in the early spring, a time of relatively low seasonal availability of fresh produce. Fresh fruits and vegetables are generally preferred over canned or frozen varieties.

References

1. Lachapelle, D., Gamache, C., Brodeur, J. M., & Sevigny, J. (1989). Frequency of food consumption in children: Weekdays versus weekends. *Journal of the Canadian Dental Association*, 55(1), 61-65.
2. Haines P. S., Hama, M. Y., Guilkey, D. K., & Popkin, B. M. (2003). Weekend eating in the United States is linked with greater energy, fat, and alcohol intake. *Obesity Research*, 11(8), 945-949.