

Background and Documentation:

2009 California Children's Healthy Eating and Exercise Practices Survey

California Department of Public Health
Network for a Healthy California

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California Department of Public Health. (2011). *California Children's Healthy Eating and Exercise Practices Survey, 2009* [Data Table X]. Retrieved Month day, year, from California Department of Public Health, *Network for a Healthy California* Web site: [enter web link here](#).

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 *Network for a Healthy California—Children's 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 Public Health directed by the *Network for a Healthy California*. It is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the California Department of Public Health, and administered by the Public Health Institute.

Sample and Methods

In April of 2009, a food diary was mailed to a demographically balanced sample of 2,398 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. Those who completed the diary received \$25 cash.

By the July 20, 2009 deadline, 856 children completed this part of the survey. A sub-sample of 390 children took part in a follow-up, non-assisted telephone survey on their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about healthful eating and physical activity. The sampling error was \pm two-three percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level for the diary and \pm three-five percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level for the telephone sample. The response rate was 36 percent for the diary and 53 percent of diary respondents were interviewed for the telephone survey that followed. Low-income households were oversampled (i.e., those at or below 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and above 130 percent through 185 percent FPL). The mail and telephone samples were weighted to reflect the 2008 Current Population Survey findings for households with 9- to 11-year-old children based on race/ethnicity, FPL, and SNAP participation.

After weighting the data, the 856 diary respondents were almost evenly divided between boys and girls. Forty-nine percent were Latino, 33 percent white, 12 percent Asian/other, and 6 percent African-American.¹ Most children were in the fourth or fifth grades. Eighty-seven percent of children attended public school while the remaining went to parochial, private or were home schooled. Fifteen percent of the children came from households with less than a \$25,000 a year income, and 56 percent came from households with an annual income of \$50,000 or more. Nearly one in ten children lived in households receiving SNAP.

The 2007 *CalCHEEPS* data tables provide bivariate relationships unadjusted for any other variables.

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

Limitations

Multiple limitations should be noted. Cross-sectional surveys cannot infer causality. Based on the small survey samples, only the largest differences could be identified. The sample of African American children was small and may not be generalizable to the population at large. The Latino households that took part in the study were English-speaking, underrepresenting children from households in which Spanish was the primary language spoken at home who, along with African American children, are more likely to live in poverty (The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2009).

Data collected were self-reported by the children, which could be inaccurate or biased in the direction of social desirability. While *CalCHEEPS* uses an unassisted telephone interview to reduce parental influence on attitudes and beliefs, children may be reluctant to report attitudes and behaviors regarding diet and PA that diverge from their parents (Klesges et al., 2004). The parent-assisted food and exercise diary, which was utilized to improve the accuracy of child reporting, also could have been subject to social desirability. Compared to measured data, parent-reported height and weight overestimate childhood overweight; the discrepancy primarily results from underreporting height (Akinbami & Ogden, 2009).

The food and activity diary was complex and lengthy, resulting in a low response rate which raises concern that the findings may not be generalizable to the population at large. Comparisons between families who filled out the diary and those who refused showed that families participating in *CalCHEEPS* were more likely to: have a household income of \$75,000 or more, be married, be White, be age 40 or over, have a college degree or higher, and be employed full time.

Market-research panel households provide a "best-case" sample of 9- to 11-year-old children because they are accessible over time, interested in research, and willing to complete the surveys. During weekdays, children's schedules are more structured, many are likely to eat school meals, and dietary choices tend to be lower in snacks and fast foods (Haines, Hama, Guilkey, & Popkin, 2003). Only English-speaking households were included, so families using other languages were not represented.