

PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS & UPDATES

TEXAS RESEARCH-TO-POLICY COLLABORATION PROJECT

August 2025



Updated Texas Child Health Status Reports

What do we know about the health status in Texas children? How do Texas children compare to children in the United States? The Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living updated our series of user-friendly materials to highlight child health in Texas using data from the Texas School Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) survey.

Read the [updated reports!](#)

Healthy Children, Healthy State:

Child Obesity in Texas

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

CHILD OBESITY IS A MAJOR PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN IN TEXAS

Childhood obesity has long-term health impacts. Children with obesity are more likely to have obesity in adolescence and adulthood. It is important to take preventative steps early to combat childhood obesity.¹

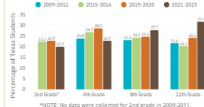
Obesity Status Among Texas Children

- Texas has the 6th highest obesity rate for children ages 6-11 in the U.S.²
- 1 in 4 of school-aged children and adolescents in Texas have obesity, compared to 1 in 5 students in the United States.
- 29% of school-aged boys have obesity compared to 22% of girls in Texas.
- The percentage of students in Texas with obesity varies by where students live.
 - Community type
 - 22% in large urban communities
 - 26% in urban & suburban communities
 - 28% in rural communities
 - Texas/Mexico border
 - 29% in border counties
 - 25% in non-border counties

Why Should We Address Children's Obesity

- Obesity is associated with increased risks for poor physical and psychological health outcomes, including:¹
 - Chronic diseases: diabetes, heart disease, asthma, high blood pressure
 - Depression and anxiety
 - Sleeping difficulties

Trends in Child Obesity in Texas (2009 to 2023) Varies by Grade Level



UTHealth Houston School of Public Health | TEXAS Department of Health

Healthy Children, Healthy State:

Child Physical Activity in Texas

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

TEXAS CHILDREN ARE NOT GETTING THE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY THEY NEED

Children and adolescents should engage in 60 or more minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) every day for optimal health and fitness.³ Few can talk but not stay during moderate activities, such as brisk walking and cycling; you cannot stay more than a few words without pausing for a breath during vigorous activities, such as dancing, jogging, and playing football.

Physical Activity Shortfall

- Only 23% of Texas school-aged children were physically active 60+ minutes/day on all 7 days during the previous week.
- The percentage of students who physically active 60+ minutes on all 7 days varies by where students live.
 - Community type
 - 21% in large urban communities
 - 22% in urban & suburban communities
 - 20% in rural communities
 - Texas/Mexico border
 - 22% in border counties
 - 25% in non-border counties
- Opportunities outside of physical education classes in schools are not being fully utilized.
 - 25% of children ages 6-12 play outdoors 3 or fewer days/week.
 - 4% of elementary and 40% of middle and high schools do not have classroom physical activity breaks.
 - 52% of middle schools do not allow students to use gym facilities and equipment outside of school hours.

Why Physical Activity Matters

- Health benefits of being physically active include:^{4,5}
 - Improved heart and lung health
 - Strengthened bones and muscles
 - Maintenance of a healthy weight
 - Improved mood and lower risk of depression
 - Improved memory, attention, & mental processing speed
 - Improved academic performance

Texas children and adolescents only meet these physical activity guidelines 4.3 days/week. Girls meet 4.1 days/week and boys meet 4.7 days/week.



UTHealth Houston School of Public Health | TEXAS Department of Health

Healthy Children, Healthy State:

Child Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Consumption in Texas

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

INTAKE OF SUGARY DRINKS IS HIGH IN TEXAS CHILDREN

Beverage consumption is an essential part of a healthy diet. Children and adolescents should drink plain water and plain pasteurized milk, and avoid consuming sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB) for optimal health.⁶

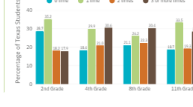
Sugary Drinks Intake Among Texas Children

- 78% of school-aged children and adolescents in Texas consumed at least 1 sugar-sweetened beverage in a day.
 - 75% in girls
 - 81% in boys
- Fruit-flavored drinks are the most frequently consumed sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB) at least once a day in 2nd, 4th, and 11th grades.
 - 30% in 2nd grade
 - 45% in 4th grade
 - 36% in 11th grade
- Regular sodas are the most frequently consumed SSB at least once a day in 8th grade.
 - 45% in 8th grade
- 38% of children in 2nd and 4th grades consumed flavored milk or milkshakes at least 1 time a day.

Why Should Children Limit Intake of Sugary Drinks?

- Consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is associated with increased risks for adverse health outcomes, including:^{7,8}
 - Overweight and obesity
 - Tooth decay
 - Chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and hypertension
 - SSB with caffeine is associated with sleep-related issues, fatigue, late bedtime, and depression

The number of times a sugar-sweetened beverage was consumed yesterday



Note: Sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB) include regular sodas, coffees with sugar, fruit-flavored drinks, flavored milk, and energy drinks.

UTHealth Houston School of Public Health | TEXAS Department of Health

[Child Obesity in Texas](#)
Updated August 4, 2025

[Child Physical Activity in Texas](#)
Updated August 4, 2025

[Child Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Consumption](#)
Updated August 4, 2025

TEXAS CHILDREN SPEND EXTENDED TIME ON SCREENS

Screen time includes time spent watching television, playing video games, or using an electronic device with a screen such as a smartphone or tablet.¹ Time spent watching screens is often sedentary, including sitting, reclining, and lying down and can replace physical activity.²

Prolonged Recreational Screen Time

Texas children spend significant time using screens.

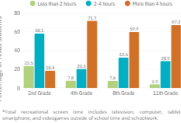
- 90% of Texas school-aged children and adolescents spend 2 or more hours/day on screens outside of school time or schoolwork.
- Time spent on screens by Texas children and adolescents varies by sex.
 - 19% of girls and 19% of boys spend <2 hours/day.
 - 34% of girls and 36% of boys spend 2-4 hours/day.
 - 56% of girls and 52% of boys spend >4 hours/day.
- 80% of Texas children and adolescents have electronic devices (TV, laptop, tablet, smartphone, etc.) in the room where they sleep.
- Having electronic devices in the room where children sleep increases by grade level.
 - 50% in grade 2
 - 70% in grade 4
 - 90% in grade 8
 - 99% in grade 11

Why Children Should Limit Their Screen Time

Sedentary behaviors, including screen time duration and frequency, have negative health impacts on children and adolescents, including:^{1,2}

- Lower physical fitness
- Increased risk of overweight and obesity
- Poor cardiometabolic health
- Poor mental health
- Shorter sleep duration

Total recreational screen time hours/day*



Child Screen Time in Texas
 Updated August 4, 2025

TEXAS CHILDREN DO NOT GET SUFFICIENT SLEEP

Healthy sleep is critical for children and adolescents to grow and develop physically, psychosocially, and cognitively.¹ Insufficient sleep at night is associated with poor academic performance and various adverse health consequences.²

Texas children do not meet sleep recommendations

43% of Texas children and adolescents sleep less than 8 hours per night.

80% of Texas children and adolescents have electronic devices (TV, laptop, tablet, smartphone, etc.) in the room where they sleep.

Students NOT meeting sleep recommendations increases with grade level.

The percentage of students NOT meeting sleep recommendations varies by where students live.

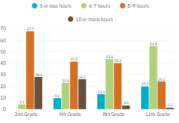
- Texas/Mexico border vs. non-border counties
 - 44% vs. 32% in grade 2
 - 64% vs. 57% in grade 4

Why Sleep Matters

Not meeting sleep recommendations is associated with adverse health outcomes in children, including:^{1,2}

- Increased risk for injuries and accidents
- Increased risk of overweight and obesity
- Increased risk of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases
- Increased risk of depression
- Increased risk of attention and behavioral problems
- Poorer diet quality and increased soft drink consumption

Hours of sleep on a school night



Child Sleep in Texas
 Updated August 4, 2025

BREAKFAST IS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF A HEALTHY DIET FOR CHILDREN

Regular breakfast consumption by children and adolescents is associated with favorable health outcomes. However, many children in Texas do not eat breakfast, which can affect children's overall nutritional status and well-being.

Breakfast Habits of Texas Children

Daily Breakfast Habits of Texas Children:

34% of girls and 29% of school-aged boys did not eat breakfast.

Skipping breakfast increases with grade level:

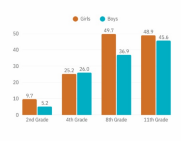
- 7% in 2nd grade
- 25% in 4th grade
- 43% in 8th grade
- 47% in 11th grade

Why Breakfast Consumption Matters

Regular breakfast consumption in children is associated with:^{1,2}

- Lowered risk for obesity
- Promotion of healthy body composition and growth
- Improved executive function, memory, attention, and mood
- Improved academic performance and achievement
- Better overall diet quality

Breakfast skippers during the school week



Child Breakfast Consumption
 Updated August 4, 2025

Explore our updated Texas Child Health Status Reports!

2025 TX RPC Project Achievements Document

TEXAS RESEARCH-TO-POLICY COLLABORATION PROJECT

2025 Achievements: January – June



2025 TX RPC PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS



STUDENT TRAINEES



Students have supported:

- Health Policy Resource Report development
- Texas Legislature Bill Tracker updates

PUBLICATIONS



1 publication was selected as a blog for *Evidence & Policy Journal*



View the blog:

SOCIAL MEDIA



26

TX RPC Project posts focused on promoting the Bill Tracker and relevant resources.

WEBPAGE ANALYTICS: PAGE VIEWS



2025 LEGISLATIVE BILL TRACKER

View Bill Tracker:



Bill Tracker Topics

- Nutrition and Food Access
- School-based Health
- Healthcare Access
- Physical Activity and Built Environment
- Family & Child Health
- Environmental Health
- Tobacco & E-Cigarettes



Upcoming Webinar

Local Wellness Policies and the Role of School Health Advisory Councils

September 16, 2025, from 11:00 am - 12:00 pm CT

Register here

Local Wellness Policies and the Role of School Health Advisory Councils (SHACs) are vital in helping promote healthy learning environments for school-aged children. This webinar will define both local wellness policies and SHACs and provide useful resources individuals can use in their local school districts.

Past Webinars



The Status of Child Health in Texas: Results from the Texas SPAN 2021-2023 Survey

March 26, 2025

What is the status of child health in the Lone Star State since COVID-19?

- The Texas School Physical Activity and Nutrition (Texas SPAN) survey collected data during the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years. Updates on child obesity, dietary intake, and physical activity behaviors are presented.
- Results show improvements in some areas but challenges in other outcomes and behaviors.



Health Promotion for Children in Rural Settings

February 20, 2025

This webinar details current challenges and opportunities related to health promotion efforts for children living in rural settings in the United States.

Learn about:

- Current health-related statistics (physical activity, screen time, sleep, and healthy eating) for children in rural areas, compared to those living in suburban and urban areas,
- How we define “rural” in the United States and what impact that may have on health promotion programs/research,
- New ways in which we can address health-related disparities for children in rural communities.



Fostering Mental Well-Being: Strengthening Support Systems at Home, School, and Beyond

May 21, 2025

Mental well-being is fundamental for individuals, families, and communities to thrive. This webinar discusses:

- How to manage and maintain positive mental well-being changes throughout different life stages
- Explore health and well-being best practices for parents, families, and educators to support school environments
- Discuss coordinated strategies that elevate mental health awareness in communities.

Recent Publications

Featured Publication:

Hunt ET, Marshall AN, Malkani R, Ranjit N, Pérez A, Badillo DJ, Gartner DJ, Schelfhout A, Narayanan VR, Pfledderer CD, Hoelscher DM. Validation of the Texas School Physical Activity and Nutrition (SPAN) Dietary Index Against the Healthy Eating Index Among Elementary-Aged Students. *Nutrients*. 2025; 17(12):1965. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu17121965>.

- The SPAN Healthy Eating Index yielded results similar to the detailed Healthy Eating Index based on 24-hour food recalls.
- Results of the study indicate that the SPAN Healthy Eating Index could be a useful tool

for evaluating diet quality in schools efficiently and at a lower cost.

- This index is also useful in determining trends in youth eating habits.

Additional Publications:

Almohamad M, Li R, Heredia NI, Dave JM, Calloway EE, Sharrief AZ, Sharma SV. [When access is not enough: The role of utilization barriers in nutrition security and cardiometabolic risk](#). Nutrients. 2025;17(12):2031.

Attri SA, Springer AE, Kelder SH. [A scoping review of school connectedness interventions for adolescents](#). J Sch Health. 2025.

Brand K, Flores-Thorpe S, Zhang Y, Roebuck A, Menendez T, Linton R, Scott TB, Crowley DM, van den Berg AE, Hoelscher DM. [Evaluation of researchers' policy-related knowledge, needs and self-efficacy before and after the 2021 Texas Legislative Session](#). Evidence & Policy. Published online ahead of print 2025. doi:10.1332/17442648Y2025D000000054

Gartner, DJ, Janda-Thomte, K, Nielsen, A, Chen, B, van den Berg, A. [Shifts in Food Acquisition and Consumption Habits During COVID-19: Insights from a Diverse Sample](#). Disaster Med Public Health Prep. 2025 Jul 17.

Lee M, Conroy JH, Yang, Z, Lee, S, Yeh, PG, Lopez, JZ, Heredia NI, Mitchell-Bennett, LA, Sifuentes, M, Reininger, BM. [Improved Depression Symptoms Among Low-Income Mexican Americans Participating in a Community-Clinical Diabetes Intervention](#). J Prim Care Community Health. 2025 Jul 30.

Macias-Navarro L, Heredia NI, Walker TJ, Massa JS, Moore MA, Momin S, Hoelscher DM. [Development and psychometric properties of a self-efficacy scale for healthy meals in a diverse sample of adults](#). Research Square. 2025;rs-3.

Resource Corner

The TX RPC Project develops accessible and accurate public health policy-related resources from field experts. Links to specific resource categories on our website can be found below:

[Texas
Legislative
Bill Tracker](#)

[Michael & Susan
Dell Center for
Healthy Living
Webinar Series](#)

[TX RPC Project
Health Policy
Resources](#)

[Texas Child
Health Status
Reports and
Toolkits](#)

[TX RPC Project
Newsletters
Archive](#)

Request information on a public health topic.

About

The [Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration \(TX RPC\) Project](#) is a nonpartisan network that aims to bridge research and policy by supporting partnerships between child health researchers and legislators.

If you and your legislative office are interested in collaborating with our team to receive data-driven information at state, district, and local levels, please reach out to TXRPCNetwork@uth.tmc.edu.

Contact Our Team

[Dr. Deanna Hoelscher, PhD](#), Principal Investigator

[Dr. Alexandra van den Berg, PhD](#), Co-PI

[Tiffni Menendez, MPH](#), Project Director

[Yuzi Zhang, PhD](#), Postdoctoral Fellow

[Shelby Flores-Thorpe, PhD](#), Postdoctoral Fellow

[Kirsten Handler](#), Communications Lead

For more information about the TX RPC Project, please email: TXRPCNetwork@uth.tmc.edu.



Texas Research-to-Policy
— Collaboration Project —

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living
1836 San Jacinto Blvd, Suite 510
Austin, TX 78701 US

[Unsubscribe](#)
[Update Profile](#)
[Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!