



# COMMUNITY HEALTH DATA BASE

An Information Service of Public Health Management Corporation

*Data findings*

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AMONG ADULTS AND CHILDREN IN SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA

July 2012

With the official start of summer underway, many adults and children are taking advantage of this warmer weather by being more active outdoors. This is great news for their health! There are numerous benefits to regular physical activity, including:

- Burning calories and reducing body fat;
- Reducing appetite;
- Improving chronic medical conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease;
- Improving the ability to perform daily tasks;
- Decreasing risk for osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease; and
- Decreasing risk of early death

Now is as important as ever to get outside and stay active! In the U.S., about 53% of adults do not meet the recommended levels of physical activity despite the growing body of evidence about the benefits from being physically active [1]. In addition, more than one-third of U.S. adults (35.7%) and approximately 17% (or 12.5 million) of children and adolescents aged 2-19 years are obese. This prevalence rate has dramatically increased over the last 20 years, and is associated with an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and certain types of cancer [2]. To combat this upward trend in obesity, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that individuals should aim to engage in some form of physical activity at least three times a week along with eating a healthier diet. Spreading out physical activities throughout the week is also recommended as a way of reducing the risk of injuries [3].

Using data from PHMC's Community Health Data Base 2010 Southeastern Pennsylvania (SEPA) Household Health Survey, the following article examines adults 18 years of age or older and children 3 years of age or older and living in the SEPA region who are considered physically inactive. Physically inactive individuals are defined as those who exercise or are physically active less than the recommendation of at least three times per week.

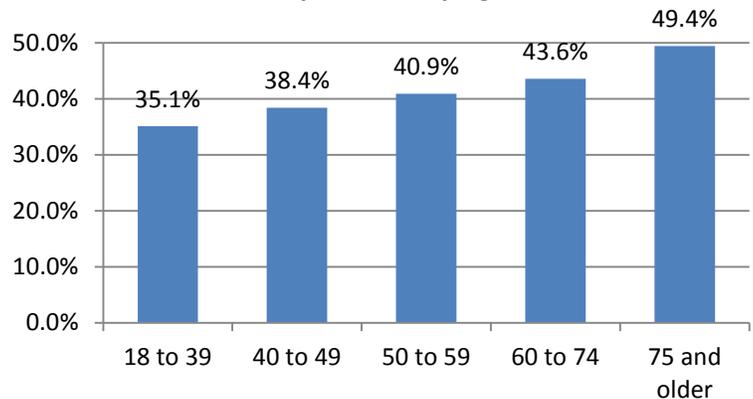
### Demographic Characteristics among Adults

- In Southeastern Pennsylvania (SEPA), 39.6% of adults are physically active less than three times per week, representing nearly 120,000 adults in our region. In addition, three in five adults in SEPA (62.9%) are either overweight (35.7%) or obese (26.3%), representing approximately 1.8 million adults.



- About two-fifths of adults living in Philadelphia (41.8%) exercise less than three times per week, followed by Delaware (40.1%), Montgomery (39.8%), Bucks (38.6%), and Chester (35.3%) Counties.
- Women (41.1%) are slightly more likely to exercise less than three times per week than men (38.4%).
- Almost half of all Latino adults (48.9%) exercise less than three times per week compared to Black (43.3%), Asian (38.6%), and White (38.4%) adults.
- As age increases, the percentage of adults who exercise less than three times per week also increases – 35.1% of adults aged 18 to 39, 38.4% of adults aged 40 to 49, 40.9% of adults aged 50 to 59, 43.6% of adults aged 60 to 74, and 49.4% of adults aged 75 or older are considered physically inactive in Southeastern Pennsylvania. (Figure 1)
- Almost half of all adults living below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level (46.8%) exercise less than three times per week compared to 38.2% of adults living at or above the poverty level.\*
- As educational attainment increases, the percentage of adults who are physically active less than three times per week decreases. About half of adults with less than a high school education (54.3%) exercise less than three times per week compared to 42.9% of adults with a high school education, 38.3% of adults with some college education, 36.8% of adults with a college education, and 34.1% of adults with post-college education.

**Figure 1. Adults (18+ years) Who Exercise Less than Three Times per Week by Age, SEPA, 2010**



Source: PHMC's Community Health Data Base 2010  
Southeastern Pennsylvania Household Health Survey

### Physical Activity and Social/Environmental Networks among Adults

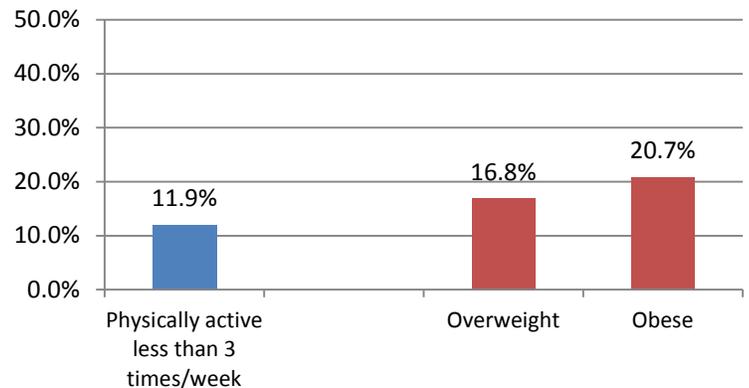
Evidence shows that social support may play a role in increasing the amount of exercise an individual does every week [4].

- In the SEPA region, almost half of adults who live alone (44.2%) exercise less than three times per week compared to 39.2% of adults who do not live alone.
- More than two-fifths of adults who do not participate in any local groups or organizations (43.7%) exercise less than three times per week compared to 36.2% of adults who participate in at least one local group or organization.
- Additionally, as public recreation facility utilization decreases, the percentage of adults who exercise less than three times per week increases. About a quarter of adults (26.6%) who use recreational facilities at least once a week exercise less than three times per week compared to 37.1% of adults who use recreational facilities at least once a month, 45.2% of adults who use recreational facilities less than once a month, and 49.2% of adults who never use recreational facilities.

## Demographic Characteristics among Children

- In Southeastern Pennsylvania, about one in ten children 3 years of age or older (11.9%) are physically active less than three times per week. In addition, nearly two-fifths of children 6 years of age or older in SEPA (37.4%) are either overweight (16.8%) or obese (20.7%), representing over 200,000 children in our region. (Figure 2)
- There are few differences in physical inactivity by children's weight status. One in eight obese children ages 6 years or older (12.2%) is physically active less than three times per week, compared with 15.1% of overweight children, and 12.5% of normal weight children.
- Girls (11.4%) are slightly more likely to be physically active less than three times per week than boys (8.8%).
- Similar percentages of Black (11.4%), Latino (10.9%), Asian (10.8%), and White (9.2%) children are physically active less than three times per week.

**Figure 2. Physical Activity and Weight Status among Children (3-17 years) , SEPA, 2010**



Source: PHMC's Community Health Data Base 2010  
Southeastern Pennsylvania Household Health Survey

Recommendations to increase physical activity among adults and children from a public health standpoint include community wide mass media campaigns, increased access to recreational facilities, and increased opportunity for physical activity in schools. In 2010, Philadelphia launched an initiative that incorporates these recommendations [5]. The 'Get Healthy Philly' campaign aims to:

- Increase the availability and affordability of health foods;
- Decrease consumption of unhealthy foods and beverages; and
- Increase physical activity among Philadelphians, both adults and children

To learn more about this campaign, and to get ideas for what you could do in your own county, [click here](#).

For more information about the findings presented in this article, please contact Sarah Ingerman at [singerman@phmc.org](mailto:singerman@phmc.org).

\*Poverty level is calculated based on family size and income. For example, a family of four with an annual income of less than \$33,075 in 2009 was considered living below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level.

### Citations:

[1] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). U.S. Physical Activity Statistics, 2008. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/stats/index.htm>



[2] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Prevalence of Obesity in the United States, 2009-2010. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db82.pdf>

[3] US Preventive Services Task Force. Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans: Recommendation statement. 2008. Available at: <http://www.health.gov/PAGuidelines/>

[4] McNeill L, Kreuter M, Subramanian S. Social environment and physical activity: A review of concepts and evidence. *Social Science and Medicine* 2006; 63:1011-1022.

[5] Philadelphia Department of Public Health. Get Healthy Philly: Nutrition and Physical Activity Program. Available at: <http://www.phila.gov/health/Commissioner/Nutrition.html>