

News Release

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First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS)



First Nations health survey reveals the “good, the bad, the ugly” about life in First Nations in Canada.

Ottawa, ON – The results of the Children’s Survey will be delivered today, at the National Conference Centre in Ottawa, on the final day of a three-day RHS conference to unveil its second-ever national report. The RHS is the most comprehensive snapshot on the health of First Nations in Canada.

Jane Gray, the National Coordinator of the First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey, or RHS, said today that the results of this second report “confirmed what many First Nations have assumed for years. Other surveys either paint a dismal portrait or a rosier picture of reality than what health care workers and parents in these communities have felt.”

For example, the results for the Children’s portion of the RHS have found that home environments are more stable than many Canadians believe:

- Almost all (95%) live with one (40%) or both (55%) parents (including biological, adoptive and/or step-parents). Most (61%) one-parent households also included at least one other adult;
- Almost all (95%) live with one (40%) or both (55%) parents (including biological, adoptive and/or step-parents). Most (61%) one-parent households also included at least one other adult;
- Childcare was more often in private homes rather than formal settings (65% vs. 31% of those in childcare);

The birth weight of First Nations children is not lower than those of average Canadian birth weights, countering what many health studies have repeated over the years.

- First Nations children are no more or less likely than Canadian children in general to be born with low birth weights (5.5% vs. 5.6%) but more likely to have high birth weights (21% vs. 13%)

Not all of the news has been good, thus the theme of this year’s RHS conference, “*The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly.*”

- Half (50%) of children aged 3-5 years participate in physical activity everyday compared to 37% of older children, 9-11 years old.
- More than half (58%) of children were either overweight (22%) or obese (36%) according to international body mass index standards.
- The most common chronic conditions were:
 - asthma (15%);
 - allergies (12%);
 - chronic ear infections or problems (9%);
 - chronic bronchitis (4%);

- learning disability (3%).
- About one in eight children (12%) had one or more of the disabilities asked about;
- The rate of disabilities among First Nations children is almost double that for Canadian children in general (7.8% vs. 4.4%), considering only those disabilities asked about in both the RHS and the Canadian National Population Health Survey.
- Nearly one in five (18%) experienced at least one injury serious enough to warrant medical attention in the year before the survey. The rate was higher than among Aboriginal children living off-reserve (12%) and among Canadian children overall (10%);
- The proportion of children who were injured was higher among those whose parents attended residential school.

The First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey, or RHS, delivered its first report in 1999 and is expected to file a total of four national surveys by 2014. This report is the result of more than 22,000 surveys in 238 First Nations communities across Canada between August 2002 and November 2003. The conference began Sunday, November 13, and runs until Tuesday, November 15.

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