



PRESS RELEASE

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Immigrant families suffer high risk of child obesity

Children in families with non-native ethnicity are more likely to become overweight and obese, according to the results of a survey in seven European countries published today.

While obesity levels are rising among children across Europe, the researchers found the levels are generally higher among children who have a non-native mother tongue, or whose parents who were born in another country.

‘We have found several possible causes of the difference between native and non-native families,’ said project leader Professor Johannes Brug, of the VU University Medical Center of Amsterdam. ‘The consumption of soft drinks tends to be higher in children from non-native families, and regular meals such as breakfast may get skipped more often. The children also watch more television and participate in less sporting activity. However, they do walk or cycle to school more often.’

‘Cultural and lifestyle differences need to be set in the context of family resources, including skills and education but also financial resources and access to support and health information,’ he said. ‘Lower educational status is a risk factor for obesity in all communities, and is a contributory factor for these families.’

‘We should also recognise that the differences between native and non-native families is smaller than the differences between families in southern and northern Europe,’ he added. ‘National factors matter more than immigration status.’

Over 7,000 families in Belgium, Greece, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia and Spain were included. The research is supported by a €2.9m grant from the European Commission, and will include pilot testing new interventions designed to reduce sedentary behaviour in children aged 10-12 years.



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Notes:

1. The results of the surveys undertaken in the ENERGY study are published in the August edition of the journal *Pediatric Obesity* and online on 22nd June 2012. Journal details are at [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)2047-6310](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)2047-6310) A copy of the pre-publication manuscript is available at http://www.iaso.org/site_media/uploads/ijpo_67_MVS.PDF

2. The surveys were run in spring 2010 and included a total of 7017 children aged 10-12 years. A summary of the results is shown here:

	Overweight (including obese)		Obese	
	Native	Non-native	Native	Non-native
Belgium	14%	23%	3%	4%
Greece	42%	30%	11%	8%
Hungary	25%	39%	5%	13%
Netherlands	15%	26%	3%	9%
Norway	14%	23%	1%	2%
Slovenia	27%	28%	5%	10%
Spain	25%	24%	3%	0%

3. Countries involved in the ENERGY study are: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, the United Kingdom and Australia, with measurements taken in the seven countries shown in the table.

4. Further details of the ENERGY study are available at www.projectenergy.eu

5. The ENERGY study is funded with a grant from the European Commission DG Research, Seventh Framework Programme. The products of the research are the responsibility of the authors: the European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of them.

