

IRELAND'S FIRST 'HEALTH HOMEWORK' CAMPAIGN IMPROVING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS AMONG CHILDREN

- Almost one in ten children aged between four and twelve years have dieted, admit parents–

Monday, 20th April: New research among some of the 60,000 school kids, parents and teachers who are taking part in Super Troopers with laya healthcare, Ireland's first 'health homework' programme, shows that treating daily physical activity with the same importance of regular schoolwork has resulted in a sustained increase in children's daily activity levels, improved concentration levels in class and healthier eating habits.

Following the success of the programme, there is growing support for schools to adopt a 'physical literacy'* programme as part of the national school curriculum with the majority (94%) of parents believing it a good idea, supported by 88% of teachers saying that physical activity homework, like Super Troopers with laya healthcare, is a positive step to encourage kids to achieve the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity a day.

While the programme is focused on increasing physical literacy, Super Troopers used the interim wave of research among parents, school kids and their teachers to explore the issue of childhood obesity, with some interesting views emerging:

Childhood obesity: the facts

- One in four teachers (27%) blame junk food, followed by too much time watching TV/playing video games (24%), lack of exercise (20%) and lack of education around childhood obesity (17%) as contributing factors to childhood obesity.
- This view is shared by parents who blame junk food (37%) and lack of exercise (25%) as the main reasons for childhood obesity.
- Almost one in five (17%) Mums and Dads are concerned about their child's weight
- 34% of parents don't know their children's weight
- 95% of teachers say that a child's parents are responsible for combating obesity. 94% of teachers say that a child's weight can increase their risk of being a target of school bullying
- Of the 3% of parents who believe that their child has been the victim of bullying due to their weight, 21% indicated that this weight related bullying took place at home

Childhood obesity: an issue that weighs heavy on parents

- The Super Troopers with laya healthcare research reveals that two thirds of parents know their child's current weight, with one in two parents saying that regular weight management is important (59%)
- While the majority (95%)of parents don't consider their child overweight, almost one in ten (8%) admit they know their young child has been or has tried to go on a diet

Dr. Fiona Chambers, Director of Sports Studies and Physical Education at UCC and advocate of Super Troopers with laya healthcare, said: "The World Health Organisation recommends that children and adolescents need to get 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day. To achieve this goal [in addition to weekly curricular physical education], bouts of physical activity need to happen every day before, during and after school and require school/community/family engagement. The Super Troopers with laya healthcare programme helps to bridge the gap across school/home/community through its physical activity and wellbeing homework. This helps primary care givers to work with primary schools to foster lifelong physical activity and wellbeing. This means that the health and wellbeing message is constantly reinforced across school-home-community settings and can lead to physical activity becoming a daily habit for life."

Active results

The research among 379 national school teachers and almost 1,000 parents nationwide indicates that the Super Troopers programme has been a success, with 71% of teachers and 70% of parents confirming that taking part in Super Troopers resulted in an increase in children's daily activity levels, and one in four teachers (25%) remarking that children's concentration levels improved as a result of the programme. Kids are feeling the benefits too, with one in two (57%) kids aged 4-12 years admitting to eating more fruit and veg because of Super Troopers, 64% of children say they are drinking more water and almost half spend more time playing games.

Super Troopers provides an easy-to-follow physical activity journal based on short-burst activities that marry daily exercise with imaginative fun. Parents are asked to sign off each activity at the end of the week just as they would regular schoolwork.

Commenting on the campaign, D.O. O'Connor Deputy Managing Director and Director of Business Development at laya healthcare, Ireland's second largest health insurer and proud sponsor of Super Troopers said: "We were blown away by the enthusiastic reaction to our inaugural Super Troopers campaign. Since last September, 60,000 children from over 300 schools have embraced the programme and our interim research shows that it's making a tangible, positive difference in terms of increasing levels of physical activity and concentration levels in class, which is the best result we could have asked for.

"We'll use the findings from this wave of research to look at how we can evolve and improve Super Troopers. Clearly junk food and lack of exercise are the main concerns of parents and teachers and we have introduced easy and fun nutritional tips for kids to follow, along with fun daily activities as part of the 'health homework' activity journal to help address this. Top of our agenda with Super Troopers is to address worrying levels of inactivity of kids, which in turn we hope will help address the very real and present danger that childhood obesity poses for our kids today."

*Physical literacy – Term used to describe the competency and ability to carry out basic skills and movements such as running, skipping, throwing and catching