

[< Back To The Science](#)

Healthy Communities Study (HCS)

Project timeframe

2010-2016

Point of contact

[S. Sonia Arteaga, Ph.D.](#)

On this page

[At a Glance](#)

[Key Findings](#)

[How It's Conducted](#)

What was the goal of the HCS?

The Healthy Communities Study (HCS) was an important six-year study that included 130 communities and over 5,000 children and their families in the United States. The study's goal was to understand how characteristics of community programs and policies relate to children's eating, physical activity behaviors, and their health. Findings from the HCS have helped inform community leaders about what types of programs and policies may help children's health.

AT A GLANCE

This was a six-year study in 130 communities that involved over 5,000 U.S. children and their families

and their families.

One of the largest studies to assess the relationship between child health and characteristics of community programs and policies to prevent childhood obesity.

The HCS was co-funded by other NIH Institutes and had other federal and private partners.

The study found that targeted investments in community policies and programs can help improve the health and wellbeing of children.

What were the key findings of the HCS to date?

Data from the HCS suggest that children tend to have less body fat, or lower body mass indices, when living in communities with policies and programs that target certain physical activity and nutrition behaviors. Results also show that healthy weight among children is influenced by environments that make it easier and more rewarding for children to be physically active and eat healthy. The HCS results suggest that targeted investments in community policies and programs can contribute to the improved health and wellbeing of children. The NHLBI continues to leverage HCS data to support new discoveries.

More Information

HCS researchers examined data collected from families to help:

- understand associations between the characteristics of community programs and policies and the body mass index, diet, and physical activity level for all participating children, as well as for children who lived in communities that have a high proportion of African American, Latino, or low-income residents; and
- identify community, family, and child factors that influence observed associations between community programs and policies and the body mass index, diet, and physical activity levels in children.

How was the HCS conducted?

The study included a diverse sample of communities. These communities were selected either randomly or if they had promising programs or policies related to children's eating of physical activity. The study team collected data from key community members, schools, families, and medical providers. In each community, 10 to 14 key community members in different roles were selected to take part in the study. Then, up to two elementary and two middle schools, or a Kindergarten through 8th grade school, were chosen and invited to participate. Schools helped recruit students and their families and allowed the study team to collect information about the food and physical activity environment at the school. The study enabled researchers to study how body mass index changed for children over a 10-year period.

More Information

The study team traveled to each community to visit schools and met with community members and families to collect information that would be examined for the study. Community members provided information on programs and policies that related to children's eating and physical activity health. Schools provided information about the food and physical activity environments. Families provided information about their child's eating patterns and physical activities habits, and allowed their child to be measured for height, weight, and waist circumference. The parents and caregivers were measured for height and weight, as well. Lastly, medical providers provided information on the child's height and weight history. Medical providers were only contacted when the parent gave consent to the study.

Battelle Memorial Institute carried out the study together with a research team from the University of South Carolina, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Kansas, the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, and Examination Management Services, Inc.

NHLBI led this NIH-wide study, which was co-funded by other NIH Institutes, including the National Cancer Institute, the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, and the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation were also partners in this study.

Related Scientific Focus Areas

[Heart and Vascular Diseases](#)

[Obesity, Nutrition, and Physical Activity](#)

[Population and Epidemiology Studies](#)