

Portrait of the health of 6th graders in Montréal unveiled at the Grand Rendez-vous montréalais “Comment vont nos jeunes ?”

Montréal, 10 May 2018. This morning at the Grand Rendez-vous montréalais “Comment vont nos jeunes ?”, the regional public health department (DRSP) released the results of a large survey of Montréal children in grade 6, carried out in 2017. Close to 300 municipal, education, community and philanthropic stakeholders, as well as health and social services professionals are currently attending the Grand Rendez-vous at Palais des congrès.

“Today, with our partners, we’re launching a collective initiative focused on the issues that emerged from the TOPO survey results. The information collected from participants as they transition to adolescence allows us to set clear priorities for action to improve the health, well-being, and educational success of children in elementary and high schools,” announced with enthusiasm Dr. Mylène Drouin, regional director of public health at CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l’Île-de-Montréal.

“In order to implement effective public policies, we needed a better understanding of the realities of young Montrealers. The reliability of the data collected enables us to act collectively and help our youth develop their full potential,” said Rosannie Filato, the member of the city's executive committee responsible for social and community development, homelessness, status of women, youth and sports.

The TOPO survey draws a very accurate portrait of young Montrealers aged 11 and 12. This is the first survey to reach such a high number of Montréal students in this age group and their parents, and to look at some many issues. Close to 13 400 children in grade 6 and 7 800 parents answered a questionnaire on behaviours and lifestyle habits, social relations, educational success and health.

Sociodemographic data

Results of the TOPO survey show that a majority of 6th graders in Montréal are children from immigrant families: almost 60% have one or both parents born outside Canada. One outcome of such cultural diversity is that a large proportion of youth speak several languages: for instance, 57% speak more than one language at home.

Even though 85% of them have at least one parent who has a college or university degree and 92% have at least one parent who is employed, 16% live in a household that didn’t have enough money for essential items like food or rent in the past year.

Health and lifestyle habits

Almost all—95%—of young respondents perceive themselves as healthy. However, they could change some habits, since 65% of the children are not physically active enough, 62% don’t eat enough fruit and vegetables and 40% spend two or more hours a day in front of a screen.

A healthy diet and regular physical activity help prevent chronic diseases, and contribute to good mental health and educational success. Good habits developed in childhood and adolescences also often extend into adulthood.

Social support

Overall, young Montrealers in grade 6 believe they have good social support: 86% reported having a high level of support from their families, 62%, from their friends and 54% at school.

Strong family relationships encourage adoption of healthy lifestyle habits and behaviours. Having friends enables children to talk about their problems more easily when they are going through difficult periods. Moreover, having the support of a teacher or other adult at school fosters a sense of security and well-being, as well as academic engagement, all of which positively influence educational success.

Educational success

In Montréal, the school dropout rate was 16% in 2013-2014. The TOPO survey shows that dropping out of school is already a risk in grade 6. One in 20 students, or 5%, is at high risk of dropping out. This situation should be monitored closely, since the risk increases during the first years of high school.

Differences between boys and girls

There are differences between boys and girls, especially regarding physical activity. Over 70% of girls are not physically active enough, compared with 59% of boys.

Another difference is having “direct” aggressive behaviours. This type of behaviour consists in voluntarily inflicting physical pain to others or uttering threats. Among boys, 53% reported engaging in direct aggressive behaviours, compared with 36% of girls.

Some problems more prominent in disadvantaged areas

TOPO also revealed that more students from the most disadvantaged areas regularly drink sugary drinks and eat junk food, spend more than 4 hours a day in front of a screen, and are not sufficiently active.

Partners

The City of Montréal, Québec en forme and Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon provided funding for both the TOPO survey and Grand Rendez-vous montréalais "Comment vont nos jeunes?".

The Direction régionale de santé publique du CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal conducted the survey in 2017, with the collaboration of Montréal school boards, Fédération des établissements d'enseignement privés, Association of Jewish Day Schools, and funding from Montréal – Métropole en santé.

For more information about TOPO 2017: topomtl.ca

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