



Children's Health and Well-being

January 2009

A report issued by UNICEFⁱ presented findings from the assessment of 21 OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries including the USA and Canada and countries in Europe.

Six components of "well-being" (material well-being, health and safety, educational well-being, family and peer relationships, behaviours and risks, and subjective well-being) were used in the assessment and comparison.

According to the study, children growing up in the UK suffer greater deprivation, worse relationships with their parents and are exposed to more risks from alcohol, drugs and unsafe sex than those in any other wealthy country in the world. The Netherlands tops the league, followed by Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Spain. The bottom five are Portugal, Austria, Hungary, the United States and the **United Kingdom.**ⁱⁱ

The UK lags in other areas too such as the number of children living in relative poverty, vaccination rates, and the time spent talking, or eating with a parent or parents.ⁱⁱⁱ

The UK was in the bottom third for all of the above components except for health and safety.

The following lists UK results within the rankings of the 21 countries (highest to lowest) for some of the health and well-being measures among young people:

- **Mean number of days on which young people age 11, 13, and 15 report being physically active for one hour or more of the previous/typical week:**

1. Ireland (4.5 days per week)
2. Canada (4.4 days)
3. United States (4.4 days)
4. Czech Republic (3.8 days)
5. Austria (3.1 days)
- 6. United Kingdom (4.2)**

The mean is 3.9 days a week. **The UK is slightly above the mean at 4.2 days per week.**

The lowest was 3.1 days which is the average for both Austria and France.



- **Percentage of young people age 13 and 15 who report being overweight (BMI guidelines):**

1. United States (25.1%)
2. Canada (19.5%)
3. Spain (16.9%)
4. Greece (16.0%)

- 5. United Kingdom (15.8%)**

The mean is 12.9%. **The UK is a bit above the mean at 15.8%.**
The lowest was 7.1% for Poland.

- **Percentage of young people age 11, 13 and 15 who report being bullied in the previous two months:**

1. Portugal (48.5%)
2. Austria (44.0%)
3. Switzerland (40.5%)
4. Canada (37.2%)
5. Germany (36.5%)

- 6. United Kingdom (35.8%)**

The mean was 31.0%. **The UK is a bit above the mean at 35.8%.**

The lowest was 15.0% for Sweden.

- **Percentage of young people age 11, 13 and 15 who rate their health as "fair or poor":**

- 1. United Kingdom (22.6%)**

2. USA (19.8%)
3. Portugal (19.1%)
4. Norway (18.5%)
5. Netherlands (17.2%)

The mean was 14.1%. **The UK was above the mean by 8.5 at 22.6%.**

The lowest was 9.0% for Spain, closely followed by 9.1% for Switzerland.

Overall, approximately 80% of young people consider their health to be good or excellent in every OECD country except the United Kingdom.



- **Child Mortality: Deaths from accidents and injuries per 100,000 under 19 years old (average of last three years available):**

1. New Zealand (23.1)
2. United States (22.9)
3. Portugal (19.9)
4. Czech Republic (18.7)
5. Poland (18.3)

The UK **was number 20 out of the 21 countries assessed at 8.4.**

The mean was 14.3. **The UK was 5.9 below the mean at 8.4.**
The lowest was 7.6 for Sweden.

¹ Child poverty in perspective: An overview of child well-being in rich countries: A comprehensive assessment of the lives and well-being of children and adolescents in the economically advanced nations; Report Card 7, Innocenti Research Centre, UNICEF, 2007.

² PSHE Network email news/National Children's Bureau, 14 February 2007.

ⁱⁱⁱ "British youngsters get worst deal, says UN", Sarah Womack, Telegraph website, 15 February 2007.

