



# Promoting physical activity in children and young people based on the Icaps experience

## Why should we promote physical activity in children and young people?

Together with healthy eating habits, regular physical activity is key to people's health. An increase in sedentary behaviour has now led to a rise in the most common chronic diseases.

Over and above its immediate effects on health, regular physical activity during childhood and adolescence is beneficial for at least two reasons:

- When physical activity is enjoyable, it is a good indicator of the level of physical activity in adulthood.
- Many of its benefits extend into adulthood, regardless of how active the adult is.

Although the number of hours of physical education provided in the French curriculum is among the highest in the European community and the leisure activities available are again greater, **barely half of young French people achieve the level of physical activity defined by official recommendations (60 minutes minimum per day of moderate or intense activity).**

## How should we promote physical activity in children and young people?

### One strategy of action that has proven effective: Icaps

Icaps, «Intervention centred on adolescents' physical activity and sedentary behaviour» is an initiative introduced in France which was recognised as effective by the WHO in 2009. It consisted of various partners in the project implementing a series of actions that focused on **three areas: the child or adolescent** (their knowledge, attitudes and motivation), **their social support** (family, teachers, instructors) to encourage young people to increase their level of practice) and **their physical and organisational environment** making it conducive to physical activity.

This intervention / study involved one thousand 6th grade students in eight schools in the Bas-Rhin region between 2002 and 2006. Introduced by Professor Chantal Simon and her research team at the University of Louis Pasteur in Strasbourg, it was conducted as a randomised controlled trial: students in the Icaps intervention group were compared with those in non-participating schools. Every year, students filled out questionnaires on physical activity, lifestyle and attitudes to physical activity. They also underwent an annual medical examination (weight, height, body fat, blood pressure) and a blood test every two years.

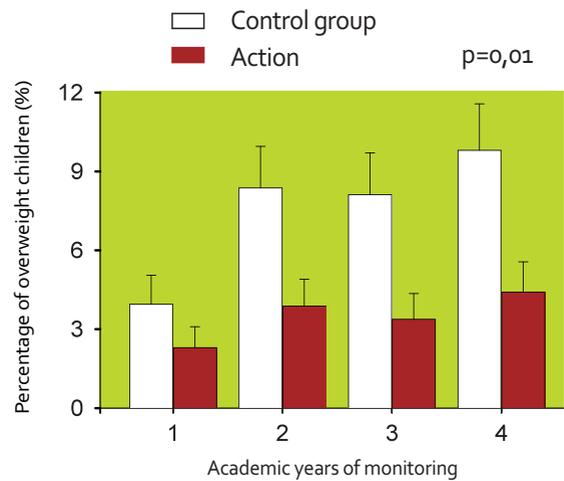


<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. Interventions On Diet And Physical Activity: What Works. Evidence Tables. 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Simon C, Schweitzer B, Oujaa M, Wagner A, Arveiler D, Tribby E, Copin N, Blanc S, Platat C. Successful overweight prevention in adolescents by increasing physical activity: a 4-year randomized controlled intervention. Int J Obes (Lond). 2008 Oct;32(10):1489-98.

After four years, the results of the study showed an increase in recreational physical activity of about one hour a week and a reduction in the time spent watching television each day. A reduction in weight gain during adolescence was seen and the risk of obesity was decreased. For normal weight children, the risk of being overweight at the end of the study was reduced by over 50% in schools in the Icaps intervention group (see figure below). The intervention was also associated with a reduction in certain cardiovascular risk factors.

Evolution of overweight prevalence among initially normal weight adolescents

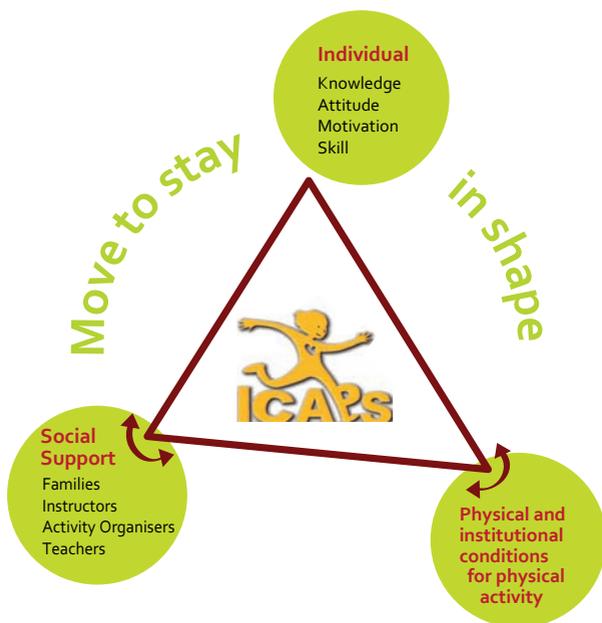


The first results of a follow-up study six years on (Icaps2) show effects lasting two years after the intervention ended which are more pronounced in young people who are most sedentary and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

## How can the extension of this intervention strategy be facilitated?

### The socio-ecological approach

Intervention is likely to be more effective if, from the outset, it is part of a **socio-ecological approach incorporating several areas and types of action:**



Areas of Icaps intervention according to the International Journal of Obesity (2004)

- changing attitudes and motivation toward physical activity, through debate and awareness-raising initiatives and through access to new attractive, varied and user-friendly activities,
- encouraging social support (parents, teachers and sports instructors) to promote physical activity and encourage young people to increase their level of practice,
- providing environmental conditions that promote physical activity inside and outside school (extra curricular and out-of-school time), during leisure time and in daily life, so that young people can implement the knowledge and skills that they have acquired and so that it is easier to choose an active daily mode of transport.

### Anchoring the project to the school environment

In terms of reducing health inequalities, the school environment provides guaranteed access for all young people.

In addition, besides the physical activities and sports provided as part of the school curriculum, schools provide many opportunities for physical activity (after hours, between classes, break time, sessions offered by the school sports association, journey to and from school).

## Physical activity that can be incorporated into the daily lives of young people

New activities can be offered during the lunch break, during school hours and after-school time, taking into account the barriers to being active (lack of time, unsuitable timetables, distance and inaccessibility of sports facilities, cost, sense of physical disability, etc.).

Activities, within or outside the curriculum, can be organised as close as possible to the school by sports federations and sports instructors, with no reference to the notion of competition. They can also be held in leisure centres, at day camps or meeting places for young people. The emphasis is on the pleasure of taking part and play so as to encourage young people to get involved whatever their ability.

Events, which are supported and supervised, may be organised periodically: multi activity days, sports days with parents, walks or hikes, events with top athletes, « Bike to school!» days, etc. These thematic days can be an opportunity to promote both an active lifestyle and new physical activities to students and their parents.

## Possible frameworks for implementation

Introducing this type of project is based on a broad cross-sectoral partnership and coordination at all levels of the various stakeholders – **educational communities, health services, local authorities, sports and leisure clubs, parent-teacher associations, regional health, social and sports authorities, etc.** – to identify existing actions and resources and encourage synergies. In most cases, it is not about introducing a new project or mobilising new resources but, more **about creating links and complementarities between the actions already implemented within the framework of local policies, health programmes and school policy.**

## Support from Inpes

INPES - the National Institute for Prevention and Health Education (L'Institut national de prévention et d'éducation pour la santé) is a public health institute which was created in 2002. INPES is responsible for implementing policies on disease prevention and health education in the broader context of policy guidelines for public health.

INPES' missions are:

- Expertise and advice for prevention and health promotion
- Development of health education throughout France
- Implementation of public health programmes in areas such as addictive behaviours, infectious diseases, chronic diseases, mental health, nutrition and physical activity, sexual health, environmental health and for populations such as children and the elderly.

## Offering an implementation guide

Co-written by the Icaps team and Inpes, this guide aims to help **those involved at the grassroots level – elected officials, instructors, leaders, teachers – and the structures – associations, leisure centres, sports clubs and federations, local authorities, etc.** – to put together and implement a strategy to promote physical activity in children and young people based on Icaps' experience.

It presents the operational methods for implementing an Icaps project. It provides benchmarks for action and offers a toolbox; it will be up to people working in the field to take up the proposals and local resources best suited to their context, based obviously on existing actions and programmes.

The guide Promoting physical activity in young people [*Promouvoir l'activité physique des jeunes*], Preparing and developing an Icaps type project [*Elaborer et développer un projet de type Icaps*], printed in 50,000 copies in French, is available free of charge

Download from the Inpes website: <http://www.inpes.sante.fr/index2.asp?page=icaps/>



## Supporting the implementation of Icaps projects

To generate impetus, INPES provides support for those planning to implement projects to promote physical activity. Fifteen pilot sites meeting the specifications were selected through a call for projects. They are provided with support in project methodology, and benefit from training provided by Inpes and its partners and financial support for the project start-up. 650,000 euros have been allocated for this purpose over the 2011-2013 period.

This initiative will identify the needs in methodological support, tools and training that emerge during the implementation of Icaps projects. The needs will be analysed to develop training tools and kits to be distributed at a later date.

The implementation of this project is coordinated by a national multi-partnership steering committee chaired by Inpes: The French Ministry of Education (DGESCO and DJEPVA), Ministry of Sports, Directorate General of Health, Centre national de la fonction publique territoriale [National Centre for local government services], Ecole des hautes études en santé publique [School of Advanced Studies in Public Health] (ENSP), Prof. Chantal Simon, the urban community of Strasbourg, Elus santé publique et territoires [Elected officials, public health and regions association] (ESPT), Réseau français des villes santé de l'OMS [French Network of WHO Healthy Cities] (RFVSOMS), Association nationale des élus du sport [National Association of Sports officials] (ANDES), Agence pour l'éducation par le sport [Agency for Education through Sport] (APELS), Ligue nationale contre le cancer [National League against Cancer], General Council of Moselle, association Défi santé nutrition [Fitness and Nutrition Challenge Association], Union sportive de l'enseignement du premier degré [the primary education sports union] (USEP), Atelier santé ville [the City Health Workshop] (ASV), Union nationale du sport scolaire [the National Union of School Sport], Mutualité Française [French Mutuality, mutual insurance company], Mutuelle générale de l'Education nationale [Mutual company for National Education (MGEN), Jeunesse au plein air [Youth outdoors] (JPA), the Rhone Alps skills centre.

## Additional resources

For further information in French on the Icaps study:

<http://www.mangerbouger.fr/pro/collectivites-locales/agir-74/favoriser-l-activite-physique/212-promouvoir-l-activite-physique-des-jeunes.html>

Simon C, Schweitzer B, Oujaa M, Wagner A, Arveiler D, Triby E, Copin N, Blanc S, Platat C. Successful overweight prevention in adolescents by increasing physical activity: a 4-year randomized controlled intervention. *Int J Obes (Lond)*. 2008 Oct;32(10):1489-98.

Inpes offers a number of resources in French on nutrition (food and physical activity). Inpes nutritional education website: manger bouger [website]. 2011. Online at <http://www.mangerbouger.fr>

Further information on health education teachers in France. <http://www.inpes.sante.fr/tthe>

WHO Europe (2006). Physical Activity and Health in Europe: Evidence for Action.

[www.euro.who.int/document/e89490.pdf](http://www.euro.who.int/document/e89490.pdf)

WHO Europe (2006). Promoting Physical Activity and Active Living in Urban Environments: The Role of Local Governments.

[www.euro.who.int/document/e89498.pdf](http://www.euro.who.int/document/e89498.pdf)

## Contacts

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