

# SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT CHARACTERISTICS AND NUTRITIONAL STATUS OF NATIONALLY REPRESENTATIVE SAMPLE OF 7-YEARS-OLD BULGARIAN SCHOOLCHILDREN IN 2016

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## Abstract

Starting school can be a challenging period for children due to change of daily routine, increased autonomy of choices and peer pressure. School environment characteristics (food availability at the school premises, sport facilities, physical activity, nutrition and health education classes, transportation, etc.) can play important role on the nutritional status, health and well-being of children. The aim of the present study is to assess the current school environment characteristics and nutritional status among 7-years-old Bulgarian schoolchildren.

A cross-sectional study among 7-years-old Bulgarian schoolchildren was carried out on nationally representative effective sample of 3379 children in first grade in the period from March to May 2016. The survey followed the protocol of the World Health Organization (WHO) European Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative, which was jointly developed by the WHO Regional Office for Europe and the participating Member States. Questionnaire forms assessing different characteristics of the lifestyle of children, school and family environment were filled by the examiners, parents and school personnel. Weight and height were measured with standardized equipment, body mass index (BMI)-for-age was calculated and nutritional status was assessed using WHO Growth References 2007.

All schools have playgrounds and most (84.4%) have indoor gyms in which they provide on average 3 lessons/week of physical education. 91.5% of the schools include nutrition in education, but only 65.5% are advertisement free for branded foods and drinks. 68.3% of the schools have canteens, 58.8% - cafeterias and 21.6% - vending machines. The food type availability at the school premises is not optimal.

The characteristics of the school environment need further improvement. Effective public health measures may have positive effect on the nutritional status of the 7-year-old schoolchildren.

**Key words:** School nutrition, School environment characteristics, Childhood obesity, 7-year-old schoolchildren.