

## **A Majority of Indian School Children do not possess Right Skills and Fitness Levels to Engage in Sports**

(Based on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual School Sports Skills & Fitness Study by EduSports)

**The study, covered 73 schools across 39 Indian cities during the academic year 2010-2011, assessed sports skills and fitness levels of over 19,797 children**

### **Key findings of the survey:**

- 61% of Indian school-going children are growing up without the right fundamental skills needed to engage in sports. This covers locomotor skills (to run and hop), manipulative skills (to throw and catch), non-manipulative skills (balancing) and spatial awareness (awareness of self-space and boundaries).
- 43% of the children have less than ideal levels of physical fitness (identified with unhealthy BMI)
- The poor skill and fitness levels are seen consistently across the country with no significant difference between metros and non-metros.
- Among a sub-group of 9185 children, a marginal improvement in key parameters was achieved with a 9-month structured physical education programme as part of the curriculum.

**Bangalore, Sep 29, 2011:** As many as 61% of school children in India do not possess adequate skills to engage in sport, says the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual EduSports in-school study of children on sports skills and fitness. Almost half the group (48%) was not fully proficient in running, 64% were not proficient at hopping, and a whopping 71% of children are unable to throw or catch properly. These are only a few of a large group of skills, classified as locomotor, manipulative, non-manipulative (or balancing) and spatial awareness skills that are fundamental to any physical activity or sport. The inability of the children to perform these basic skills well coupled with the low levels of fitness puts these children at a risk of not enjoying physical activity/sports and over the long run becoming inactive as adolescents/adults.

The EduSports study is the second annual in-school survey covering 19,797 children in 73 schools across 39 cities in India (the list of cities is provided in the appendix to this release). The study was built into the co-scholastic curriculum of these schools during the academic year 2010-2011 and involved one-time assessments of key sports skills and physical fitness parameters in the age group of 7 to 10 years. The second part to the study involved recording the changes seen in the parameters after a controlled, structured physical education/sports programme was administered to a sub-group of over 9185 children over a period of 9 months.

Analysing the results from skills study, it was found that 56% of the children are not fully aware about their self-space and general space or boundaries that exist around them. This translates into them being unable to interact seamlessly with the people or objects in their environment. At an aggregate level, 28% of children showed a shockingly low level of proficiency across different skills and needed significant interventions to reach acceptable

levels of proficiency in these skills. This can be delivered through an age-appropriate and inclusive physical education programme in schools. No significant difference was noted between boys and girls when it came to locomotor and body management skills. However, boys came up a notch higher when compared to girls on manipulative skills such as dribbling balls and striking different objects.

### **Children display poor levels of physical fitness**

The fitness parameters counted for the study included aerobic capacity (or endurance-recorded by making children run/walk for 600 meters) & anaerobic capacities (measured by making children cover 30 meters in a sprint), body/muscular strength (measured by sit & reach activity, sit ups, standing long jump), flexibility and body mass index (identifies children as underweight/healthy/over-weight & obese).

43% of the children assessed had unhealthy body composition (with scores above or below the healthy BMI scores). Among the entire group of children, 24% recorded higher than normal BMI scores indicating signs of over-weight/obesity. Coupled with poor flexibility scores (again, 57% recorded average to poor scores) this group of children are probably at a risk of suffering from problems related to their back as they grow up.

Thus combined together, poor levels of skill development and low levels of physical fitness are a potent combination to deter children away from physical activity and play as they grow up. All this coupled with unhealthy eating habits (junk and processed foods) and the lure of sedentary options available for children to entertain themselves (television, internet and video games) puts an entire generation of children at risk of growing up to be inactive and unhealthy adults.

### **A structured sports PE programme helps improve the vital parameters**

However, the picture is not all doomsday prophecy with little redemption. A controlled, structured physical education programme, which focused on inclusion (active participation of all children), skill and fitness building and age appropriateness, has resulted in a marginal increase across all key parameters among children above 7 years. EduSports administered its structured sports/physical education programme over 9 months for 9185 children across 44 schools in 26 cities and recorded the changes in the critical fitness parameters. The programme consisted of weekly 2-3 sessions of physical education as part of the school time-table and catered to every child. In 9 months, the children showed remarkable improvement in body strength (10.5% in upper body strength and 3.7% in lower body strength); BMI corrections and flexibility went up by 4% and 1.7% respectively. These improvements in fitness parameters must be viewed with the perspective that other influences on fitness, such as eating habits and playtime outside school were not monitored, and can be deemed constant or unchanged.

In addition to the marginal improvement in the parameters listed above, there was also a stark change for the better in the attitudes of the children towards physical activity and sports. A parent from the Pearson Amara Jyoti Public School, Bangalore said "Earlier my son was not an active person; he never used to take up anything seriously, be it his studies or eating habits. But after EduSports has been introduced in his class, he has really become very physically active; I can see that now he has started getting into groups which was not the case earlier". Mrs. Uma Ramesh, Principal of TVS Matriculation Higher Secondary School- Madurai said "The EduSports programme has been a part of our curriculum for the

past two years. The lethargic children have overcome their laziness. They have developed immunity towards common ailments to an extent. Children with less appetite have shown improvements in their eating habits. The energy level of children has increased as we do not find them getting tired easily”

**Mr. Saumil Majmudar, CEO & Co-founder, EduSports,** said “It is disheartening to see that skills like running or throwing, which we took for granted a couple of decades ago, are now deficient among today’s children. It is only natural for anyone to move away from an activity that they do not possess the skill for. Logically, more children are opting to play less and spend more time indoors because they are unable to play! While building skills for sport is important, one cannot ignore the low physical fitness levels of children. If kids are unable to run or jump for long, they will be happy to settle on the sofa! Together, parents and school authorities must work to change this. As it has been proved, with just 2-3 hours of a focused physical education programme a week, we were able to effect a small but significant change. It is time that the focus of sports in schools moved from mere competition among the best, to include all children. PE sessions will then become enjoyable for children and skills and fitness will follow”.

#### **About EduSports:**

EduSports, India’s first Physical Education (PE) & School Sports enterprise, is working with Schools all over the country helping them develop healthier and fitter children via the medium of sports/physical activity. EduSports designs and administers a sports curriculum for K-12 schools. This curriculum is integrated into the time-table, is age-appropriate and covers all the children in the class. The EduSports school sports programme has been designed by a distinguished panel of advisors comprising of leading sports psychologists, educationists, and sports professionals with vast experience of working with K-12 schools. Currently EduSports is working with over 160 schools and covers more than 1,30,000 children across 60 cities all over India. More information about EduSports can be had at [www.edusports.in](http://www.edusports.in)