

## Are Our Young Children Healthy?

### Our Children's Health and How it Affects Readiness for School

**Good health is one of the most important things that can help a child's readiness for school.**

Children who are frequently sick, children who have untreated problems with their vision or hearing, or who have other delays or disorders, cannot make the most of school learning opportunities.

Health has many facets, including getting adequate rest, good nutrition, frequent exercise, and regular physical and dental checkups, including routine preventive care, like immunizations. Pediatricians and community developmental-screening clinics play an important role by helping parents identify children's health issues early, and helping them find the appropriate treatment. Ideally, every child has a "medical home"—a consistent place for ongoing care with a health care provider their family knows and trusts.

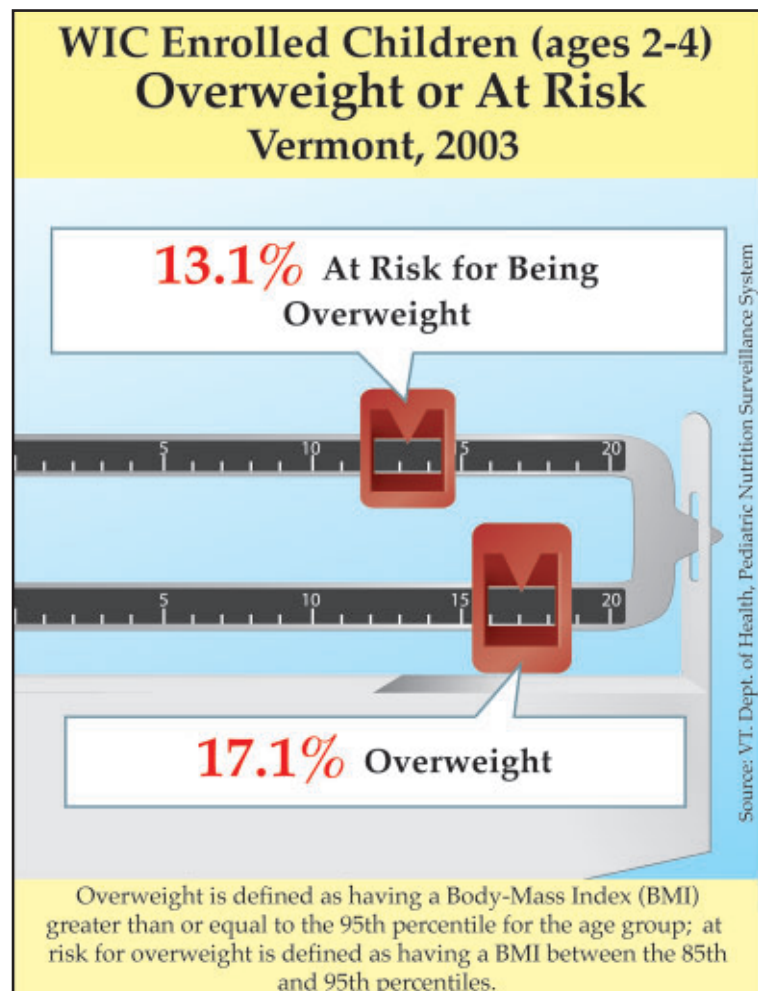
### What Do We Know About the Health of Our Youngest Vermonters?

A healthy infancy is the best preparation for later health. Low birthweight is a leading cause of infant mortality and a number of health problems that may extend into childhood. The single most important thing parents can do to prevent low birthweight is to avoid smoking during pregnancy. Other ways to help avoid low birthweight include getting prenatal care early in pregnancy, gaining enough weight during pregnancy, and leaving adequate time between pregnancies.

Nearly every Vermont child has access to health insurance, through private insurers or Dr. Dynasaur. Nine out of ten two-year-olds are up-to-date on their immunizations for common illnesses of childhood.<sup>1</sup>

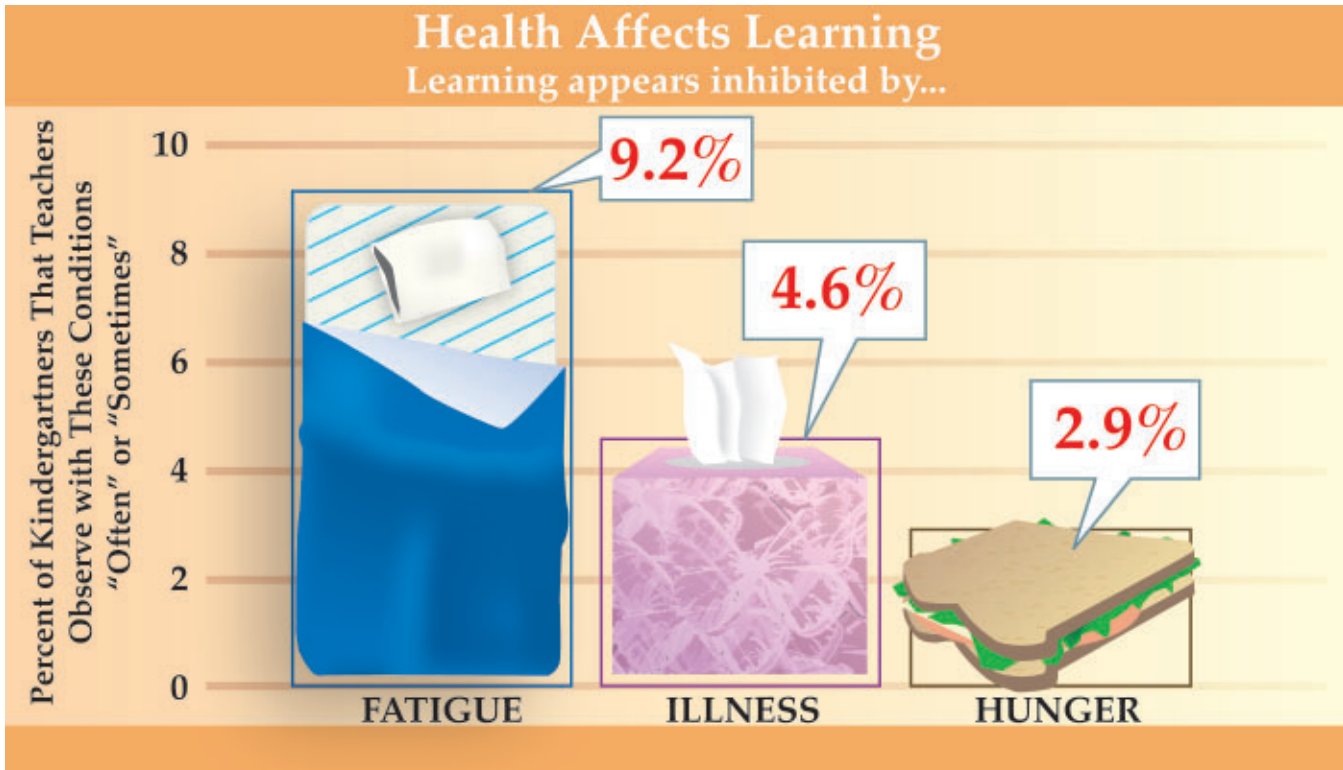
But there are also some disturbing figures about our young children. Many live in older housing where they may be exposed to lead-based paint—a potent threat to a child's developing brain.<sup>2</sup> Among two- to four-year-olds enrolled in Vermont's WIC program (more than 1 in 3 of this age-group), more than a quarter are considered overweight or at risk for being overweight.<sup>3</sup> Overweight contributes to many health problems as children get older.

*cont'd inside...*



# Health Factors Affecting Learning

Vermont kindergarten teachers tell us that about one in ten children are coming to school too tired to learn well. About one in twenty children are missing out on learning because of illness. And about one in thirty are sometimes too hungry to learn.<sup>4</sup>



## What Can You Do?

- Keep up with regular check-ups with your child's doctor and dentist. Discuss any concerns you have about your child's health.
- Don't smoke (and don't allow others to smoke) around young children.
- Use car seats and seat belts appropriately for ALL children.
- Encourage children to eat a variety of healthy foods; and limit sodas, "fast food," and sugary snacks.

**Encourage children to get outdoors and play; it works even better if you can do this as a family.**

- Encourage children to get outdoors and play ("exercise"); it works even better if you can do this as a family. And, by the way, put some real limits on TV watching; there is a lot of evidence now that television can be harmful to children.

## For More Information:

### *The Dr. Dynasaur Program*

1-800-250-8427

### *Children With Special Health Needs Program*

1-800-660-4427

### *The "Quit Line" (for quitting smoking)*

1-877-YES-QUIT

(1-877-937-7848)

[www.tobaccofreevt.org](http://www.tobaccofreevt.org)

### *Vermont WIC Program*

1-800-464-4343 ext. 7333

### *Food Stamps*

1-800-287-0589, or contact your local office of the Department for Children And Families

### *Fit & Healthy Kids Initiative*

[www.healthyvermonters.info/hi/fit/fithome.shtml](http://www.healthyvermonters.info/hi/fit/fithome.shtml)



1 Vermont Agency of Human Services. The social well-being of Vermonters. Accessible at [www.ahs.state.vt.us](http://www.ahs.state.vt.us).

2 Meyer PA, Pivetz T, Dignam TA, Homa DM, Schoonover J, and Brody D. Surveillance for elevated blood lead levels among children-United States, 1997-2001. *MMWR Surveillance Summaries*, 52, 1-21, September 12, 2003.

3 Vermont Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance Survey data provided by Donna Bister, Vermont Department of Health, personal communication, January, 2005.

4 Vermont Agency of Human Services and Vermont Department of Education. Vermont School Readiness Assessment Initiative.



## School Readiness Series:

### What Do We Know?

Children's readiness for kindergarten  
Schools' readiness for children

### Are Our Young Children Healthy?

Children who are overweight or at risk  
Health factors affecting learning

### Families With Special Challenges

Children living in poverty  
Domestic violence and substance abuse  
Incarceration of parents  
Refugees

### Social-Emotional Development

Behavioral/emotional development  
Interaction with other students  
Challenges for teachers

### Children With Special Needs

Who are children with special needs?  
Support information

### The Workforce in Early Care & Education

Caring for caregivers  
Paid caregivers  
Investing in quality childcare

**The School Readiness Series** is one of several research initiatives currently supported by the Vermont Research Partnership. Too many children enter kindergarten with physical, social, emotional and cognitive limitations that could have been minimized or eliminated through early attention to child and family needs. States are developing comprehensive school readiness indicator systems, a necessity to sustain current investments in the most effective programs for children and to make the case for increased investments to improve outcomes for young children and their families. Vermont's School Readiness Series strives to communicate that "readiness" is a shared responsibility of families, schools and communities. The Series provides fundamental school readiness indicators and resources for additional information about what can be done to help young Vermonters make the most of school.

**The Vermont Research Partnership** was established in 1998 as a collaborative between the Agency of Human Services, the Department of Education, and the University of Vermont. The Partnership's primary objective is to study and improve the effectiveness of community-based initiatives undertaken by these three parties. The Vermont Research Partnership develops shared research agendas on topics of particular importance for enhancing policies and practices that affect children, youth, and families. Projects engage the diverse perspectives of researchers, program directors, practitioners, and community members from across the state.



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