



SUMMARY NOTE

Research Partnerships

Child health prevalence and trends

This research aims to identify trends in parent-reported health and disability in Victorian children on entry to school over a five year period (2008-2012).

Key Findings

- Asthma and allergies were the most commonly recorded health conditions across all five years (2008-2012) for Victorian children commencing school. 15% and 12% of Victorian children experienced these conditions, respectively.
- Developmental delay has trended upwards over the time period, although only very slightly. In 2008, 4.4% of children at school entry were reported as having a developmental delay which increased to 5.3% in 2012.
- Parents were concerned about child oral health and vision across the five years. Concern ranged from 13% to 17% for oral health and 6% to 11% for vision.
- The proportion of children at school entry who had a serious accident or injury had an overall decline from 2.2% of children in 2008 to 1.8% in 2012.

Project Methodology

Data source

- Data collected in the School Entrant Health Questionnaire (SEHQ), from 2008 to 2012. The SEHQ is completed by parents/guardians of Victorian children at the time of school entrance to provide a comprehensive assessment and profile of the health, wellbeing and development of young children.¹
- Data on approximately 80% of all school entrants for each year was collected, ranging from 54,602 children in 2008 to 60,495 in 2012.

Data analysis

- The prevalence and trends of a range of health and disability issues across the five years were examined.

¹ The administration of the SEHQ is managed by the Victorian Primary School Nursing Program located within the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Table 1: Frequencies of health problems at school entry for Victorian children from 2008 to 2012

	2008 (n= 54,602)*		2009 (n= 54,921)*		2010 (n= 56,044)*		2011 (n= 58,991)*		2012 (n= 60,495)*	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<i>Asthma</i>	7,847	14.5	8,178	15.1	8,060	14.7	8,970	15.6	9,023	15.4
<i>Allergy</i>	6,158	11.5	7,325	13.8	6,305	11.5	6,587	11.6	6,745	11.6
<i>Developmental Delay**</i>	2,346	4.4	2,569	4.8	2,663	5.1	2,917	5.3	2,959	5.3
<i>Serious accident/injury**</i>	1,185	2.2	1,204	2.3	926	1.8	1,048	1.9	1,001	1.8
<i>Very low birth weight**</i>	929	1.7	962	1.8	1,033	2.0	1,033	1.9	1,088	1.9

* The denominator for each condition may differ due to missing responses **Parent identified

Results

- Examining only the conditions with data for all five years, a large proportion of children (38%-43% from 2008-2012) entered school with a health condition.
- As shown in Table 1 asthma and allergies were the most commonly recorded health conditions across all five years for Victorian children commencing school. Across the years 15% and 12% of Victoria children experienced these conditions, respectively.
- The prevalence increased slightly for developmental delay over the five year time period (4.4% in 2008 increasing to 5.3% in 2012) and the prevalence decreased for serious accident/injury (2.2% in 2008 falling to 1.8% in 2012).
- The percentage of children with allergies was stable across the five year period (around 11%) except for a spike in 2009 where 13.8% of children were reported as having an allergy problem.
- Parental concern for children's oral health (mouth, teeth or gums) ranged from 17% in 2009 to 13% in 2010. Parental concern for oral health in 2012 was 15%. Parental concern for vision ranged from 6% in 2008 to 11% in 2009. Parental concern for vision in 2012 was 8%.

Conclusion

- Due to the very large sample size in this study, and that almost all children who enrolled to start school in Victoria are included, we can have confidence that the study provides a representative profile of conditions affecting children as reported by parents/guardians.
- When looking at changes in levels of reported health problems it is important to consider the impact of:
 - Diagnostic definitions
 - Screening programs
 - Health promotion programs.
- Children enter school with a range of conditions which can alter their future health, learning and development. These in turn can affect their academic performance and future opportunities.
- Monitoring population trends in early childhood health conditions provides important data upon which to base policy, program and service decisions for both universal and targeted strategies.
- This research on trends in child health problems can assist in informing where action needs to be focused particularly where health problems or concerns are increasing or are at high proportions. It may also be beneficial in contributing to evaluation of past health intervention.

This research is the result of a partnership between the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.