



The Health of Pacific Adults and Children

This paper presents key findings about the health and wellbeing of Pacific adults and children in 2011/12, which come from the New Zealand Health Survey.

In summary

Almost all (98%) Pacific children aged 0–14 years are in good health, according to their parents. About 86% of Pacific adults aged 15 years and over reported that they are in good health.

However, the survey results also found that Pacific adults experience disadvantage in several key areas of health. These include having high levels of obesity and diabetes, and being more likely to have experienced some types of unmet need for health care. Key challenges include improving these areas of health for Pacific peoples, improving their access to health care, and ensuring that health services are appropriate for and responsive to Pacific peoples.

Health behaviours and risk factors

One in seven Pacific children is given solid food before four months of age

The Ministry of Health recommends exclusive breastfeeding until a baby is about six months old, when solid food should be introduced. One in seven (14%) Pacific children under five years had been given solid food before four months of age. This rate is higher than the rate for non-Pacific children.

Pacific adults and other adults have similar levels of fruit intake

Eating a healthy diet and being physically active can help maintain a healthy body size. The proportion of Pacific adults who eat at least two servings of fruit each day (54%) is relatively similar to the national average (59%).

However, Pacific adults were less likely to eat at least three servings of vegetables each day (46%) than the population overall (68%). They were also less likely to be physically active (46%) than the general population (54%).

Pacific children and adults have higher obesity rates

Over one in five Pacific children (23%) and three in five Pacific adults (62%) are obese. These rates are at least 2.5 times as high as the rates for non-Pacific children and adults respectively. Obesity rates for Pacific adults and children have not changed since 2006/07.

One in four Pacific adults smokes

About one in four (26%) Pacific adults is a current smoker. This rate is 1.3 times as high as the rate for non-Pacific adults.

Health conditions

Diabetes disproportionately affects Pacific adults

Survey results suggest that diabetes is a key health issue facing Pacific adults. One in ten Pacific adults (10%) has been diagnosed with diabetes. This rate is more than three times as high as the rate for non-Pacific adults, after adjusting for age and sex differences. People are at greater risk of developing type 2 diabetes, among other health conditions, if they are obese.

Additionally, the 2008/09 New Zealand Adult Nutrition Survey results suggest that about half of all Pacific adults with diabetes (diagnosed or indicated through survey blood tests) had undiagnosed diabetes. This finding suggests there is scope to improve the diagnosis and treatment of diabetes, particularly for Pacific adults.

Mental distress affects one in ten Pacific adults

One in ten Pacific adults experienced psychological (mental) distress in the past four weeks (10%), which is a much higher rate than the national average (6%). By contrast, the rate of diagnosed common mental disorder for Pacific adults (7%) is much lower than the national average (16%). Together these findings suggest Pacific adults may be less likely to seek help and/or they face more barriers to accessing mental health services than other people.

Access to health care

Pacific experience unmet need for health care, especially due to cost

About 31% of Pacific adults had experienced an unmet need for primary health care in the past 12 months. Cost was the reason for this unmet need in two circumstances: it prevented a substantial proportion of Pacific adults from using GP services (17%) and from using after-hours services (10%) when they had a medical problem.

Another major reason for unmet need was that many Pacific adults (15%) were not able to get an appointment at their usual medical centre within 24 hours. Additionally, almost one in ten (9%) reported that a lack of transport prevented them from visiting a GP.

About 26% of Pacific children had experienced an unmet need for primary health care in the past year. This included 16% of Pacific children who were not able to get an appointment at their usual medical centre within 24 hours. Compared with adults, cost was less of a barrier for Pacific children in accessing GP services (7%) or after-hours services (8%). However, a lack of transport prevented 7% of Pacific children from accessing GP services. Pacific children were more likely than non-Pacific children to have experienced most of these types of unmet need.

Additionally, a substantial proportion of Pacific adults (13%) and Pacific children (11%) did not collect one or more prescription items in the previous year due to the cost. These rates were at least 1.6 times as high as the non-Pacific rates.

Pacific are more likely to have had teeth removed due to poor oral health

About 11% of Pacific adults and 6% of Pacific children had had a tooth removed due to decay or for a similar reason in the past 12 months. These rates were higher than the rates for non-Pacific adults and children.

Regular dental checks are important for detecting and treating signs of oral disease early. Basic oral health services are free for children from birth until their 18th birthday. About 73% of Pacific children aged 1–14 years had visited a dental health care worker in the past 12 months, a lower rate than the national average (78%).

Only one in three (33%) Pacific adults (with natural teeth) had visited a dental health care worker in the past year, which is much lower than the national average (49%). Most (78%) Pacific adults usually only visit a dental health care worker for dental problems, or they never visit.

The health of Pacific adults

The following table summarises the key indicators for Pacific adults aged 15 years and over.

Indicator for Pacific adults	Percent (%)	Estimated number	Time trends since 2006/07	Pacific vs non-Pacific (significant adjusted rate ratios only) ¹
Excellent, very good or good self-rated health	86	176,000	≈ No change	0.9
Current smoking	26	54,000	≈ No change	1.3
Daily smoking	23	47,000	≈ No change	1.3
Vegetable intake (3+ servings per day)	46	93,000	≈ No change	0.7
Fruit intake (2+ servings per day)	54	111,000	≈ No change	
Physically active	46	95,000	≈ No change	0.8
Obesity	62	127,000	≈ No change	2.5
High blood pressure (medicated)	11	23,000	≈ No change	1.4
High cholesterol (medicated)	7	15,000	≈ No change	1.2
Ischaemic heart disease (diagnosed)	2	3,000	≈ No change	
Stroke (diagnosed)	1	1,000	▼ Decrease	
Diagnosed common mental disorder (depression, bipolar disorder and/or anxiety disorder)	7	14,000	≈ No change	0.4
Psychological (mental) distress	10	21,000	≈ No change	1.8
Diabetes (diagnosed)	10	21,000	≈ No change	3.4
Asthma (medicated)	9	19,000	≈ No change	
Arthritis (diagnosed)	7	14,000	≈ No change	
Chronic pain	14	28,000	≈ No change	
Visited a GP in the past 12 months	75	154,000	≈ No change	
Visited a practice nurse (without seeing a GP at the same visit) in the past 12 months	20	42,000	≈ No change	0.8
Visited an after-hours medical centre in the past 12 months	13	28,000	na	
Experienced unmet need for primary health care in the past 12 months (any of following)	31	63,000	na	
– Unable to get appointment at usual medical centre within 24 hours	15	29,000	▼ Decrease	
– Unmet need for GP services due to cost	17	35,000	na	
– Unmet need for after-hours services due to cost	10	21,000	na	1.3
– Unmet need for GP services due to lack of transport	9	18,000	na	2.5
– Unmet need for after-hours services due to lack of transport	3	6,000	na	1.5
Unfilled prescription due to cost in the past 12 months	13	27,000	na	1.6
Had any teeth removed due to decay, abscess, infection or gum disease in the past 12 months	11	22,000	na	1.6
Visited a dental health care worker in the past 12 months ²	33	66,000	≈ No change	0.7
Usually only visits a dental health care worker for dental problems (or never visits) ²	78	158,000	≈ No change	1.5

na = not available, as data not collected in 2006/07, or question wording has changed since then.

¹ Only significant adjusted rate ratios (at the 5% significance level) are shown. A ratio above/below 1 means the outcome is more/less common among Pacific adults than non-Pacific adults. Adjusted rate ratios adjust for age and sex.

² Only among Pacific adults with natural teeth.

Notes: Percentages rounded to nearest whole number. Estimated numbers are rounded to the nearest 1000 people. Time trends are standardised for age. Adjusted rate ratios adjust for age and sex.

The health of Pacific children

The following table summarises the key indicators for Pacific children aged 0–14 years (or a group within this age range, where noted).

Indicator for Pacific children ¹	Percent (%)	Estimated number	Time trends since 2006/07	Pacific vs non-Pacific (significant adjusted rate ratios only) ²
Excellent, very good or good parent-rated health	98	140,000	≈ No change	
Given solid food before four months (0–4 years)	14	8,000	≈ No change	1.7
Ate breakfast at home every day (2–14 years)	83	99,000	≈ No change	0.9
Usually watched 2+ hours of television each day (2–14 years)	59	71,000	≈ No change	1.1
Obesity (2–14 years)	23	33,000	≈ No change	3.1
Asthma (medicated) (2–14 years)	14	16,000	≈ No change	
Diagnosed emotional or behavioural problems (2–14 years)	2	2,000	≈ No change	0.5
Visited a GP in the past 12 months	78	111,000	▼ Decrease	1.1
Visited a practice nurse (without seeing a GP at the same visit) in the past 12 months	18	26,000	≈ No change	0.6
Visited an after-hours medical centre in the past 12 months	22	32,000	na	
Experienced unmet need for primary health care (any of following) in the past 12 months	26	38,000	na	1.4
– Unable to get appointment at usual medical centre within 24 hours	16	22,000	na	
– Unmet need for GP services due to cost	7	10,000	na	1.5
– Unmet need for after-hours services due to cost	8	11,000	na	1.9
– Unmet need for GP services due to lack of transport	7	11,000	na	3.2
– Unmet need for after-hours services due to lack of transport	3	4,000	na	2.2
– Unmet need for GP services due to lack of child care	5	7,000	na	2.3
Unfilled prescription due to cost in the past 12 months	11	16,000	na	1.8
Visited a dental health care worker in the past 12 months (1–14 years)	73	95,000	≈ No change	0.9
Had any teeth removed due to decay, abscess or infection in the past 12 months (1–14 years)	6	8,000	na	1.8

na = not available, as data not collected in 2006/07, or question wording has changed since then.

¹ Indicator covers Pacific children aged 0–14 years unless otherwise stated.

² Only significant adjusted rate ratios (at the 5% significance level) are shown. A ratio above/below 1 means the outcome is more/less common among Pacific children than non-Pacific children. Adjusted rate ratios adjust for age and sex.

Notes: Percentages rounded to nearest whole number. Estimated numbers are rounded to the nearest 1000 children. Time trends are standardised for age. Adjusted rate ratios adjust for age and sex.

New Zealand Health Survey – at a glance

Sample: 12,370 adults aged 15 years and over, and 4478 children aged 0–14 years. This includes 938 Pacific adults and 730 Pacific children.

Mode: Face-to-face, computer-assisted interviews.

Timing: Results refer to sample selected in the 12-month period from July 2011 to June 2012.

For more information, the main survey publications and data tables, see the New Zealand Health Survey webpage: www.health.govt.nz/new-zealand-health-survey