

Our mission is to coalesce, inspire, and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.



## The Head Start Advantage

Success in Children's Physical Health

### Key Takeaways

1. Head Start children have more access to health care and have improved physical health throughout their lifetime.
2. Head Start children have healthier eating patterns, healthier BMIs, and are at lower risk of being obese or overweight.

### Measurable Impact

#### More health checkups

Head Start children are more likely to have hearing and vision screening and be covered by health insurance, receive dental checkups, and be immunized.

#### Sibling benefits

The health benefits of Head Start extend to siblings who didn't attend Head Start themselves.

**33-55%**

Children aged 5 to 9 who attended Head Start have 33-55% lower mortality rates.

**19%**

Head Start children are 19% less likely to smoke as young adults.

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## The Head Start Advantage: Success in Children's Physical Health

### Why are nutrition and healthy weight important in early years?

**Adequate nutrition** is necessary for normal brain development, especially in utero and during children's early years. Early brain development lays the foundation for cognitive, motor, and socio-emotional abilities throughout a child's lifetime. Low-income families are at a higher risk for experiencing food and nutrition insufficiency.

**Childhood obesity** has been associated with obesity later in life, as well as an increased likelihood of cardiovascular risk factors, chronic diseases, and premature death. Low-income children are also at higher risk of being overweight or obese and of having poor eating habits. Among children enrolled in Head Start programs in the 2017-18 program year, 12% of children were overweight and 14% were obese.

### What does Head Start do to promote children's physical health?

**Promoting children's health has always been a core component of the Head Start model**, with health services going far beyond what most pre-k programs offer in terms of routine screenings and individualized care. The Head Start Program Performance Standards require that programs provide high-quality health, oral health, mental health, and nutrition services that are developmentally, culturally, and linguistically attuned and that support each child's growth and school readiness.

Head Start ensures that children have access to regular screenings, immunizations, well-child visits, dental and nutrition services, healthy meals, and social service programs, like SNAP and WIC. Applying a multi-generation model, Head Start also helps parents access health insurance for their children and provides educational services to parents on health issues and health-related events for the family.

Head Start models good nutrition during the school day and works with parents to use healthy nutrition practices at home. Since increased outdoor play time is associated with decreased rate of obesity, Head Start also requires that teachers provide children with sufficient time outdoors.

For citations, please visit [go.nhsa.org/HSA](http://go.nhsa.org/HSA)



Head Start centers serve more fruits, vegetables, and milk and fewer sweetened beverages and other sweets and snacks, when compared to other child care sites.



Head Start children are three times as likely to have healthy eating patterns as non-participants.



Head Start children who received 60 minutes of outdoor play time were 42% less likely to be obese at the end of the program year.



Head Start provides sleep health interventions that increase children's sleep duration and decrease their behavioral sleep problems.



Head Start children were less likely to be hospitalized for accident or injury, and they also have fewer emergency hospital visits and miss fewer school days.

## What is Head Start?

Head Start (HS) is a comprehensive early education program for children from at-risk backgrounds from birth to age 5. From early math and reading skills to confidence and resilience, Head Start helps children build the abilities they need to be successful in school and life. Head Start recognizes the role of parents as their child's first and lifelong educators and engages parents as equal partners.