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Research Brief

How Obesity, Depression and Smoking Affect the Health and Productivity of School Staff and Their Students in Central Massachusetts High Schools



Overview

Obesity, depression and smoking affect the work of high school faculty and staff. These health risks can cause teachers and staff to be less productive at work, and to be absent from work more often. The lower productivity and increased staff absences can negatively influence the health of students and their academic success. Addressing employee health risks can improve their health and increase productivity, and help students learn the importance of taking care of their own health.

Main Questions

- What are the rates of obesity, depression, and smoking among high school employees?
- How productive are high school employees with and without these health risks?

Study

This study looked into the relationship between health risks and work productivity among 630 high school employees in central Massachusetts. The study examined obesity, depression, and smoking status, and measured the productivity of employees while at work, and the number of days absent from school.

The Bottom Line

There is an impact on everyone at school when teachers and staff are not feeling well while they are at school, and are absent more often. Teachers and staff who are obese, depressed, or who smoke may have lower job satisfaction, which can lead to high job turnover rates, and can even disrupt students' education. Productive, healthy school staff can be role models for students and foster learning. They can contribute to students' health-related education and even academic success.

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Source

Alker HJ, Wang ML, Pbert L, Thorsen N, Lemon SC. Impact of school staff health on work productivity in secondary schools in Massachusetts. J Sch Health. 2015; 85: 398-404.



Spotlight on Results

- Thirty-eight percent (38%) of participants were overweight and twenty-seven (27%) were obese.
- Eight percent (8%) of participants had scores corresponding with clinical depression.
- Only seven percent (7%) of participants reported current smoking.
- Obesity, depression and smoking lead to less on-the-job work and more school days missed.

Call for Action

Healthy employees are more productive at work, enhance the school environment and encourage students to learn about lifelong health and wellness. Worksite interventions that address risk factors and promote overall health and well-being of school employees are needed. Employees should be encouraged to seek treatment, and primary health care providers should be encouraged to monitor and treat obesity, depression and smoking.