

Kiwis amongst world's most inactive adults, finds global study

A new global report on physical activity shows the world's richest countries are becoming increasingly inactive – and New Zealanders are the third 'laziest' of the rich Western nations.

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The World Health Organization analysis of 358 population surveys from 168 countries has just been published in the *Lancet Global Health* and shows that there has been little progress in improving physical activity levels worldwide between 2001 and 2016. It also shows that New Zealanders are the third 'laziest' of the rich Western nations.

More than a quarter (1.4 billion) of the world's adult population were found to be insufficiently active in 2016, putting them at greater risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, dementia, and some cancers.

In particular around one in three women (32%) and one in four men (23%) worldwide were not reaching the recommended levels of physical activity to stay healthy – i.e. at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity, or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity per week.

New Zealand was amongst the most inactive of the 20 rich Western nations looked at in the study with on average 42.4 per cent of Kiwi's inactive (39.3% of men and 45.3% of women) behind the most inactive rich Western nations of Cyprus (44.4%) and Portugal (43.4%) and worse than Germany (42.2%), the USA (40%) and Australia (30.4%).

The countries with the most inactive people were Kuwait (67%), American Samoa (53%), Saudi Arabia (53%), and Iraq (52%). The most active nations were Uganda and Mozambique with only 6% of people insufficiently active.

"Unlike other major global health risks, levels of insufficient physical activity are not falling worldwide, on average, and over a quarter of all adults are not reaching the recommended levels of physical activity for good health," warns the study's lead author, Dr Regina Guthold of the WHO, Switzerland.

The new study is based on self-reported activity levels – including activity at work and at home, for transport, and during leisure time – in adults aged 18 years and older from 358 population-based surveys in 168 countries, including 1.9 million participants, giving a global prevalence level for physical inactivity in 2016.

The regions with the highest increase in insufficient activity over time were high-income Western countries (from 31% in 2001 to 37% in 2016), and Latin America and the Caribbean (33% to 39%). Countries driving this regional trend included Germany, New Zealand, the USA, Argentina, and Brazil.

The study said that in wealthier countries, the transition towards more sedentary occupations, recreation and motorised transport could explain the higher levels of inactivity, while in lower-income countries, more activity was undertaken at work and for transport.

The authors said a recent NCD (non-communicable disease) policy survey showed that almost three quarters of countries reported having a policy or action plan to tackle physical inactivity, but few had been implemented to have national impact.

In June the WHO Global Action Plan on Physical Activity (2018-2030) was launched recommending a set of 20 policy areas, which, combined, aim to create more active societies through improving the spaces and places for physical activity as well as increasing programs and opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to do more walking, cycling, sport, active recreation, dance and play.

In a linked comment, Dr Melody Ding from the University of Sydney said while declines in occupational and domestic physical activity were inevitable, "it is essential to incentivise transport and leisure-time physical activity in emerging economies through improving public and active transportation infrastructure, promoting social norms for physical activity through mass sports and school-level participation, and implementing sustainable programs at scale that could yield economic, environmental, and social co-benefits while promoting physical activity".