

Pulse

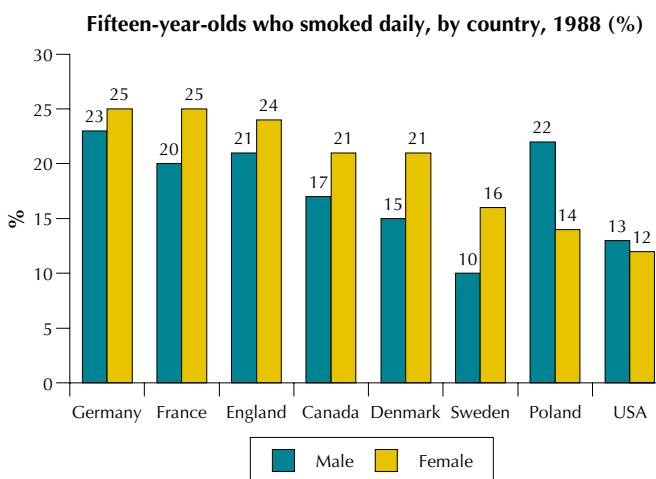
Boys and girls and healthy behaviour

The Canadian component of a multinational study that gathers information on the behaviour of schoolchildren when it comes to health risks has found some significant differences between boys and girls.

The Health Canada report *Trends in the Health of Canadian Youth*, based on data collected through the 1989/90, 1993/94 and 1997/98 survey cycles for the World Health Organization, found that in 1998 Canadian boys in Grade 10 were more likely than girls to drink soft drinks daily (60% versus 44%). Boys, however, were also more likely to eat breakfast daily (55% versus 41%), and far less likely either to be on a diet or to feel that they needed to lose weight (18% versus 45%). Grade 10 students of both sexes were roughly equally inclined to eat fruits or vegetables daily (62% of boys, 65% of girls).

Although Grade 10 boys were much more likely than girls to exercise outside of school at least twice a week in 1998 (75% versus 54%), they were also slightly more inclined to watch more than 4 hours of television a day (23% versus 19%), and much more likely to play computer games for more than four hours per week (35% compared with 5%). Sixty-six percent of Grade 10 girls had tried smoking, compared with 61% of boys, and 23% smoked daily, compared with 17% of boys.

Grade 10 boys and girls were equally likely to have tried alcohol (93% and 92%), and to have been “really drunk” at



least twice (43% for both sexes). Boys, however, were almost twice as likely as girls to drink beer at least once per week (18% versus 10%). Boys and girls were almost equally likely to have tried marijuana (44% and 41%). The latter numbers are substantially higher than they were in 1990, when only 26% of boys and 24% of girls admitted to having tried marijuana. — *Shelley Martin*, martis@cma.ca

Huge study questions HRT's role in heart health

The assumption that hormone replacement therapy helps prevent heart disease may be false, according to preliminary results made available in the midst of a US study of 27 000 healthy postmenopausal women.

Investigators with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Hormone Replacement Therapy Study found that women taking estrogen were having slightly more heart attacks, strokes and blood clots in their legs and lungs than those taking the placebo. Less than 1% experienced these problems and the initial increased risk seemed to go away after the first 2 years of hormone treatment.

The acting director of the trial, Dr. Jacques Rossouw, said that even though it is too soon to say whether the in-

creased risk of heart attacks and strokes will hold up as the trial continues, he felt morally obliged to inform participants of the findings. Each study participant received a letter informing her of the initial findings. The NIH recommends that the trial continue fully and that women in it remain and continue taking therapy.

Ten million American women take HRT, which has long been touted for its heart-protecting qualities. Studies comparing heart attack rates in women taking HRT with those who did not have consistently found lower rates of heart disease in those taking the hormones. However, these studies didn't consider the fact that women who take hormones tend to have a lower risk of heart disease anyway. They are also less

likely to smoke and more likely to exercise and have a healthy diet.

Participants in the Women's Health Initiative study, who are being followed for 8 to 12 years, have clinic visits every 6 months to assure safety and assess their health. The study tests whether long-term HRT reduces coronary heart disease and fractures without increasing the risk of breast cancer.

A study published by *JAMA* in August 1998 found that HRT for postmenopausal women with heart disease did not prevent further heart attacks or death from coronary heart disease. The Heart and Estrogen-Progestin Replacement Study (HERS) involved 2763 women, who were treated for about 4 years. — *Barbara Sibbald*, CMAJ