HEALTHY IRELAND RESULTS

THE first ever Healthy Ireland Survey has given us the most up-to-date picture of the health of the nation in the last eight years.

The survey, which includes lifestyle factors like smoking, alcohol consumption, physical activity, diet and mental wellbeing, was conducted among 7,500 people aged 15 and over.

- Fewer than one in five people now smoke.
- 65pc have good health but 28pc have a long-standing condition.
- Obesity levelling out but 60pc of people still overweight.
- Two thirds of people not getting enough exercise.
- Four out of ten people binge when drinking.
- Most people eat fruit and veg daily but 26pc eat recommended five portions.
- 17pc did not use a any form of contraception outside of a steady relationship.
- Almost half the population is in a social club or organisation.
- Good levels of mental health but better among men than women.
- 50pc of people know someone with dementia.

Minister for Health Leo Varadkar launched the national survey and noted the positive changes.

"There have been some positive changes since the SLAN survey in 2007 including a further drop in smoking rates, and the incidence of overweight has actually levelled off, while levels of regular exercise are rising. However, we still face some serious risks to the future health of the nation including alcohol misuse or harmful drinking patterns, and the significant number of people who still do not take enough exercise or who are overweight," he said.

"This survey gives us some really useful information and will be repeated every year. What you don’t measure, you can’t improve. It will feed into new policies on obesity, sexual health, and physical activity, and further legislation to control tobacco use. And we will shortly publish the Public Health Alcohol Bill. But it’s important to recognise that society as a whole needs to work with the Government to address these issues. And Healthy Ireland provides the perfect framework for that task.”

KEY FINDINGS

Some of the other key findings in the Healthy Ireland Survey include:

- Daily smoking rates have fallen to 19pc with more adults now ex-smokers than current smokers.
- 63pc of smokers are planning or considering quitting.
- The proportion of the population which is overweight or obese has stabilised but remains high at 60pc.
- Only 32pc of the population meet the national physical activity recommendations.
- "Being more physically active" was the change most frequently selected by individuals for improving their health.
- 39pc of drinkers binge on a typical drinking occasion.
- Only 15pc of those drinking at harmful levels recognised that drinking harmed their health.

Dr. Tony Holohan, Chief Medical Officer at the Department of Health, said: “The valuable data coming from this Survey will assist us to more effectively address a range of issues such as overweight and obesity, problematic alcohol consumption, smoking, and physical inactivity.”

He also explained that the Survey results would assist the Department of Health and its stakeholders to inform current policy direction and will be used to develop new policy responses from the considerable evidence about health behaviours in Ireland.

The survey has also provided evidence about issues such as social connectedness, dementia awareness and wellbeing.

Interesting findings include:

- 47pc of the population participate in a social group.
- 85pc of the population report their health as being good or very good but 28pc has a long-standing disease or health problem.
- 50pc of the population know at least one person with dementia.
- Higher levels of positive mental health were recorded among men than women.
- 9pc of the population were considered to have probable mental health problems.

The publication of the survey provides valuable information on the health, wellbeing and lifestyle behaviours and how these affect people living in Ireland. The survey included a module relating to awareness of dementia as a baseline measure to assist in the implementation of the National Dementia Strategy.

Minister Varadkar at the launch with Chief Medical Officer Tony Holohan, Kieran O’Leary Research Director at Ipsos MRBI and Kate O’Flaherty, Director of the Health & Wellbeing programme at the Department of Health.

winter 2015 | health matters | 55