

# Smartphone use may cause obesity <sup>P.16</sup>

Teenagers with more than five hours of mobile use a day stand risk of gaining surplus weight

BOSTON: Adolescents who spend five hours or more a day staring at their smartphones, tablets or computers are at a higher risk of becoming obese, a new Harvard study has warned. In the study, adolescents spending more than five hours daily on screen devices were 43 per cent more likely to have obesity compared with those who did not spend time on these devices, researchers said.

They also found that adolescents who spent more than five hours a day on screen devices were twice as likely to drink a sugary drink each day and not get enough sleep or physical activity. Researchers from Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health studied data from the 2013 and 2015 waves of the Youth Risk Behaviour Surveillance System, which included 24,800 adolescents in grades 9-12.

The survey gathered data on:



## Device alert

With childhood obesity on the rise, researchers say pediatricians should start encouraging families to set limits for both TV and other screen devices.

hours spent on screen devices - including smartphones, tablets, computers, and videogames - and watching television, hours of sleep on an average school night, number of sugar-sweetened beverages consumed in the previous seven days, and frequency of physical activity - at least 60 minutes per day - for seven days.

Researchers found that almost 20 per cent of US adolescents spent more than five hours a day on smartphones, tablets, computers, and videogames compared with only 8 per cent watching more than five hours a day of television.

Watching too much television continued to be associated with obesity and poor diet among adolescents.

Although this study cannot conclude definitively that using screen devices is causing higher rates of obesity, the findings are cause for concern.

"This study would suggest that limiting children's and adolescent's engagement with other screen devices may be as important for health as limiting television time," said Erica L Kenney from the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health.

The study appears in the *Journal of Pediatrics*.