

Dancing video game helps kids keep weight off

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SAN FRANCISCO (Reuters) - West Virginia, which has the worst childhood obesity problem in the United States, is stepping up plans to use Konami's "Dance Dance Revolution" to battle the bulge in its schools.

The state, which plans to put the popular dancing video game in every one of its public schools, said on Wednesday research suggested that it helped put a halt to weight gain.

Preliminary results from a 24-week study of 50 overweight or obese children, aged 7 to 12, showed that those who played the game at home for at least 30 minutes five days per week maintained their weight and saw a reduction in some risk factors for heart disease and diabetes.

The study's control group included a dozen children who did not play the game for the first 12 weeks, then did so for remainder of the study period. Those children piled on an average of 6 pounds during the first portion of the study but saw their weight stabilise in the second half.

The West Virginia Public Employees Insurance Agency sponsored the research project, which primarily involved children of its policy holders.

Food intake was not monitored as part of the study, said Emily Murphy, a paediatric exercise physiologist from the West Virginia University School of Medicine's paediatrics department, who was part of the research team.

Murphy said that, prior to the study, most of the children reported feeling awkward about participating in gym and physical activity at school.

Following the study, children from the group reported feeling more confident and willing to try other exercises, she said.

Murphy West Virginia plans to develop after-school clubs for playing the game.

"It's going to allow kids to be active in an after-school activity that's not sports," she said.

Obesity has been rising fast around the globe, prompting health experts to warn that lifestyle-related illnesses like heart disease and diabetes may cut average life expectancy for generations of youth.