

Press release

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Vast regional differences in overweight and smoking and drinking behaviour

There are regional differences in the Netherlands with respect to overweight and smoking and drinking behaviour as figures from the first Health Monitor, collectively published by regional health authorities (GGDs), Statistics Netherlands (CBS) and the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) show. Last year, more than 387,000 adults aged 19 years and older participated in a large-scale health and lifestyle survey.

Fewer overweight residents in regions with many higher educated

In regions with many higher educated, fewer people are overweight. With 38, 41, 45 and 45 percent respectively, the GGD regions of Utrecht, Amsterdam, Gooi & Vechtstreek and Regio Nijmegen have the lowest percentages of overweight adults. The highest percentages of overweight adults are found in the GGD regions of Zuid-Holland Zuid, Twente, Drenthe and Zuid-Limburg. Nearly 52 percent of residents in these regions struggle with overweight, i.e. their BMIs are 25 or higher. Here, too, the composition of the population partly accounts for these high percentages. In Zuid-Holland Zuid and Twente, for example, the number of lower educated is relatively high and in Drenthe and Zuid-Limburg, the number of young residents is relatively low.

There appears to be an obvious relation between overweight and education level. More than 60 percent of people whose highest level of education is preparatory secondary vocational education (vmbo) are overweight, versus only 33 percent of people educated at university level. Overweight is also related to age: one third of 19 to 40-year-olds are overweight versus nearly half to more than 60 percent in older age categories.

More smokers in low-income regions

Typically, many smokers live in GGD regions with a high proportion of low-income adults: on the one hand, the most urbanised areas in the Randstad, e.g. Haaglanden, Rotterdam-Rijnmond, Amsterdam and Utrecht, on the other hand, more rural areas in the north (Groningen, Friesland and Drenthe), east (Twente) and south (Zuid-Limburg). Approximately one in four adults in the above regions are smokers versus one in five in the regions with the fewest smokers.

Few heavy drinkers in province of Flevoland and in the 'Bible Belt'

The province of Flevoland has the lowest percentage of heavy drinkers. Approximately 6 percent of residents in this province drink four or more glasses (women) or six or more glasses (men) at least one day a week. Many residents of Flevoland have a non-western foreign background and they tend to drink less alcohol than native Dutch residents. In Zeeland, Zuid-Holland Zuid, Rotterdam-Rijnmond, Rivierenland, Midden Nederland and Gelderland Midden, the number of heavy drinkers is also lower. These regions are often collectively referred to as the so-called 'Bible Belt'.

In other parts of the country, the percentage of heavy drinkers is twice as high. In the GGD regions Hollands-Noorden, Hart voor Brabant, Twente, Amsterdam en Utrecht, the rate varies between 12 and 13 percent.

Although a relatively large share of the population in the regions Amsterdam and Utrecht have a non-western ethnic background, the number of heavy drinkers is still high. In Utrecht, the main reason is that students are overrepresented in the Utrecht population.

80 percent of people in the north feel healthy

In the GGD regions Fryslân, Gooi & Vechtstreek, Hollands Midden and IJsselland, over 80 percent in the population evaluate their health as (very) good. The population in Zuid-Limburg are the least positive about their health, although 70 percent of adult residents still rate their state of health as (very) good. Differences in age and education level only partly account for the differences between the various regions.

More information:

For more information, the reader is referred to:

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