

Football training in school greatly improves girls' fitness and health

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Picture of children participating in the Faroe Island study on health effects of football training at primary school -- with researchers professor Peter Krstrup and associate professor Magni Mohr. Credit: The Faroese Football Association

Schoolgirls can achieve lower blood pressure, stronger muscles, better balance and improved jumping performance if their school puts football training on the timetable—including girls who have never played football before.

Using football as a form of exercise in Danish municipal primary and lower-secondary schools is a great idea. All children can benefit from the activity, including girls who are not used to exercise. This is the finding of a study of the FIFA 11 for Health in Europe exercise concept in Faroese schoolchildren carried out by football researchers at the University of Southern Denmark, Department of Sports Science and Clinical Biomechanics. The results of the study have just been published in the acclaimed *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine and Science in Sports*:

"The study shows that teaching [health](#) on the football pitch improves 10-12-year-old girls' muscle strength, muscle mass, balance and blood pressure—including in girls who have no previous experience of football," says Peter Krstrup, head of research and professor of sport and health sciences at the University of Southern Denmark.

The University of Southern Denmark joined with the University of the Faroe Islands in a study of 400 children at 12 Faroese schools in which the 5th-grade children played football for 45 minutes twice a week for 11 weeks.

Good for both fitness and camaraderie

The study is a follow-up to previous studies of FIFA 11 for Health in Europe. The concept, consisting of football training combined with health teaching, has been introduced to 10,000 Danish children and will now be further rolled out in all 98 municipalities in Denmark.

"Our previous studies have shown that the FIFA 11 for Health in Europe concept improves 10- to 12-year-old schoolchildren's health profiles, cognitive function and social well-being while increasing their understanding of physical activity, varied and healthy eating, hygiene and bad habits around tobacco and alcohol. Now, we can add that this

form of football, with the focus on ball games and small pitches, is very inclusive and produces great improvements in physical fitness and health profile in schoolgirls, even if they have no previous football experience," says Peter Krustrup.

The project to teach health on the football pitch is helping children to meet the Danish Health Authority's recommendation of at least three 30-minute periods of high-intensity training a week and the primary and lower-secondary [school](#) reform's requirement for 45 minutes of daily physical activity.

"In the Faroe Islands, there is a high level of awareness of this project to teach health on the [football](#) pitch, and satisfaction that it's working for both girls and boys. It's likely that, from the next school year, the project will be implemented in grades 4 to 6 at all Faroese municipal primary and lower-secondary schools," says Magni Mohr, associate professor at the University of Southern Denmark and head of the Faroese Institute for Public Health, who has 10 years' experience of projects relating to ball games and health.

Provided by University of Southern Denmark

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