

# Schools' Challenge offers first ever measurement of fitness norms for Irish teens

## Aviva Health Schools' Fitness Challenge reveals Irish School Boys are 53% Fitter than Girls

**Dublin, 15 April 2015:** Minister of State for Tourism and Sport, Michael Ring TD and Irish International Rugby player, Robbie Henshaw today announced the winners of the Aviva Health Schools' Fitness Challenge 2015 at the Aviva Stadium. The national challenge, which measured the fitness of 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> year secondary school children, had two overall winners, Ireland's Fittest School, Boherbue Comprehensive School in Co. Cork, and Ireland's Most Improved School, Scariff Community School in Co. Clare.<sup>1</sup>

The Aviva Health Schools' Fitness Challenge, which has been ongoing for three years, is the first time in the history of the state that the fitness levels of students have been objectively assessed. Using the data of the past three years of over 58,000 children, Aviva Health, the Centre for Preventive Medicine in Dublin City University and The Wellness Initiative Alliance, now have sufficient information to develop national standardised norms for the fitness levels of children in Irish secondary schools.

The Aviva Health Schools' Fitness Challenge demonstrates that exercise intervention at a young age can improve fitness among school-going children and that continually assessing fitness levels can improve the overall health of the nation.

### **Key findings from the 2015 Aviva Health Schools' Fitness Challenge include:**

- A total of 10,289 students (5,261 boys and 5,028 girls) from 24 counties across Ireland successfully completed the challenge in 2015<sup>1</sup>
- While girls' fitness remained constant over the four school years there was a gradual increase in boys, from an average 65 shuttle runs in 1<sup>st</sup> year to an average 85 shuttle runs in 4<sup>th</sup> year students, a 30% increase<sup>1</sup>.
- A six week exercise intervention has proven to work with increased fitness levels recorded over the past three years
  - In 2013 boys completed an average of 62 shuttles<sup>2</sup> and this year they completed an average of 74 shuttles<sup>1</sup>, an increase of 19%
  - In 2013 girls completed an average of 38 shuttles<sup>2</sup> and this year they completed an average of 43 shuttles<sup>1</sup>, an increase of 13%
- The 2015 results show that boys are now 53% fitter than girls compared to 45% fitter last year highlighting the widening fitness gap between the genders
- The fitness levels of both Irish girls and boys are above the European average and they currently lie in the top 20%, however, the EU standard is worrying low<sup>3</sup>

While Irish school-going children's fitness levels are above the European average, the current aerobic fitness norms for European adolescent published in the HELENA study<sup>3</sup> are very low and do not reflect the minimum levels required for optimal health among Irish teenage girls and boys.

- Dublin, Donegal and Offaly were the top three participating counties in this year's challenge

The Aviva Health Schools' Fitness Challenge 2015 was devised by Professor Niall Moyna from the Centre of Preventive Medicine in Dublin City University and the Wellness Initiative Alliance.

Boherbue Comprehensive School completed an impressive 133 shuttles to be named Ireland's Fittest School while Scariff Community School showed a massive 47 additional shuttles between phases to be awarded the Most Improved School title<sup>1</sup>.

Speaking about the results, Prof Niall Moyna of the Centre for Preventive Medicine in Dublin City University said; "Both the schools here today and the other participating schools have demonstrated how simple it is to make large improvements to fitness over such a short period of time. Next year we are looking forward to being able to utilise all the data over the past three years to develop standardised norms for fitness levels of Irish school children for the first time. The fitness of the children across the country needs to be treated as a priority and this new method will enable us to demonstrate the exact state of our youth and enable school, teachers and parents to accurately measure fitness levels."

Prof Moyna continued; "To encourage children to start good fitness behaviour early, a new Health Science curriculum could be developed at both a Junior and Senior cycle that combines education on human biology, chronic diseases, home economics and lifestyle including physical activity, diet, smoking, alcohol and stress. Educating children about what physical activity actually does physiologically will help them understand how the body responds to exercise."

James Parker, CEO, Aviva Health Insurance speaking at the launch said, "As a health insurer, it is very important to us to encourage our customers to take a pro-active approach to their health to manage the cost of obesity related claims. Aviva Health Insurance paid over €7million last year in claims for treatments where obesity is a key risk factor.

We were delighted with the level of participation in the Aviva Health Schools' Fitness Challenge, which really highlights the importance of tracking the fitness levels of our youth to improve the health of children in Ireland. We congratulate the winning schools and we hope their achievements will inspire others to take part in next year's programme."

Irish International and Connacht Rugby player, Robbie Henshaw commented, "I am thrilled to see so many students participate in this year's Aviva Health's Schools' Fitness Challenge and it is fantastic to see the students here today who have worked so hard to achieve such incredible fitness results, I think they might even put me to the test! It is so important to stay fit and healthy when you're young and I hope all those that participated this year will keep up the good work."

The CEO of the Wellness Initiative Alliance, Ciaran Faughnan thanked Aviva Health for their continued sponsorship and support again this year and informed all the Alliance is continuing to advance the development of new technologies and will announce a launch of a new Wellness App shortly.

Elverys Sports Senior Marketing Manager, Anne-Marie Hanly concluded: "The Elverys brand is synonymous with sport and fitness and we are delighted to be involved with Aviva Health on an initiative that not only encourages kids to improve their fitness level in a fun way, but at the same time affords them the opportunity to learn the science behind healthy diets and an active lifestyle."

For further information on Aviva Health's Schools' Fitness Challenge 2015, and to view participation & fitness maps for all counties, please visit [www.avivahealth.ie/fitnesschallenge](http://www.avivahealth.ie/fitnesschallenge).

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### Notes to the Editor:

### Aviva Health Schools Fitness Challenge 2015 Winners

Fittest School	Name of School	Class
Fittest Mixed/Overall Winner	Boherbue Comprehensive School, Mallow, Cork	1.1
Fittest Boys	St Patrick's College, Cavan	1.3
Fittest Girls	Scoil Christ Ri, Portlaoise, Laois	1.1

Most Improved School	Name of School	Class
Most Improved Mixed/Overall Winner	Scariff Community School, Clare	2.1
Most Improved Boys	St. Macartan's College, Monaghan Town	3.4
Most Improved Girls	Ursuline Secondary School, Tipperary	3.1

Aviva Health Schools' Fitness Challenge is supported by Elverys Sports, who will be awarding all winning schools with vouchers for sports equipment.

Aviva Health is working with the Wellness Initiative Alliance and the Centre for Preventive Medicine, Dublin City University to promote physical activity and fitness in school-going children. The challenge is being monitored by Dr. Sarah Kelly, Institute of Technology Carlow and exercise physiologist, and challenge creator, Prof. Niall Moyna.

**About Aviva Health Insurance Ireland Ltd.**

Aviva Health Insurance Ireland Limited is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland.

**Wellness Initiative Alliance**

This Wellness Initiative Alliance is a 'Not for Profit' organisation. Its vision; an Ireland in which wellness is a core value at individual, community and national level. Its mission is to identify, develop and deliver targeted wellness initiatives in Ireland, but with a global potential. This is on a basis which is measurable and sustainable. The goal is transformative long term behavioural change in health and wellbeing. This will be achieved by utilising the latest ITC technologies and in partnership with government and the private sector.

**References:**

1. Aviva Health Schools' Fitness Challenge 2015 results
2. Aviva Health Schools' Fitness Challenge 2013 results
3. FB Ortega et al. Physical fitness levels among European adolescents: the HELENA study. Br J Sports Med 2011. 45: 20-29.