Bulimia nervosa in Canadian children and adolescents is still not clearly understood, and the Canadian Paediatric Surveillance Program is an excellent collaborative tool to provide a national picture. A new CPSP study will collect national epidemiological data on binging and purging in children and youth ages 5 to 18 to advance knowledge about this condition.

“Often kids with bulimia don’t get identified. Parents don’t know that their kids are [binging and/or purging] because the sufferers aren’t help-seeking,” says Dr. Leora Pinhas, the study’s principal investigator and the psychiatric director of the Eating Disorders Clinic at The Hospital for Sick Children. “Only four per cent who binge and purge are seen by a physician,” she adds. “The goal of this study is to get a sense of who these kids are.”

Bulimia nervosa is diagnosed based on recurrent binge eating—consuming an abnormally large amount of food within a two-hour period or less—coupled with other behaviours to prevent weight gain such as fasting, over-exercising or the misuse of laxatives.

Bulimia can cause heart problems, muscle weakness, decreased functioning of the gastrointestinal tract, dehydration, hypotension and tachycardia among others. Mortality rates range from 0 to 6 per cent.

The study began in March 2008 and will run until February 2010.

“The CPSP has been amazing,” says Dr. Pinhas. “The program is a very important tool for Canadians to better understand child health. We are the envy of other countries.”

For more information visit www.cps.ca/cpsp or e-mail cpsp@cps.ca.