

**HEALTHY HABITS  
START  
EARLIER THAN  
YOU THINK.**



**active  
healthy  
kids  
CANADA**

**The Active Healthy Kids Canada  
Report Card on Physical Activity  
for Children and Youth** **2010**

# START YOUNG. START STRONG.

## The early years are a critical period for growth and development.

Parents, health professionals, educators and caregivers must work together to build the foundation needed to sustain physical activity throughout life.<sup>2</sup>

There may be an assumption that physical activity occurs naturally at a young age and doesn't require attention or study. We need to know more about the relationships between physical activity and healthy early development.

What we do know about the physical activity and lifestyle patterns in the early years is not promising:

- » The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) indicates that only 36% of 2-3-year-olds and 44% of 4-5-year-olds regularly engage in unorganized sport and physical activity each week.
- » A survey of Edmonton parents indicates that only 42% of preschoolers get 90 minutes of physical activity per day. <sup>SHAPE</sup>
- » In childcare centre settings, one US study shows that 89% of children's time is spent being sedentary.<sup>26</sup>

Whatever the setting, children under five require adequate unstructured play and time outdoors for physical, cognitive and emotional development.

In 1971, the average age at which children began to watch TV was 4 years; today, it is 5 months:<sup>11</sup>

- » More than 90% of kids begin watching TV before the age of two,<sup>11</sup> despite recommendations that screen time should be zero for children under two, and limited to 1 hour for kids 2-5.<sup>12</sup>
- » The NLSCY indicates that 27% of those aged 2-3 and 22% of those aged 4-5 are watching more than 2 hours of TV per day.

Overweight and obesity in Canadians under six is rising. Two regional reports tell us the prevalence of obesity in those aged 2-5 years is between 8-11%.<sup>3,4</sup> National data show that 15.2% of 2-5-year-olds are overweight and 6.3% are obese.<sup>5</sup> This reality should be high on public health agendas given that:

- » Obesity in infancy persists through the preschool years.<sup>6</sup>
- » Children who become obese before the age of six are likely to be obese later in childhood.<sup>7</sup>
- » Obese children have a 25-50% increased risk of being obese as adults.<sup>8</sup>
- » It is estimated that overweight 2-5-year-olds are four times as likely to be overweight as adults.<sup>9</sup>



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN THE EARLY YEARS

### Policy-makers

**Invest in active living for children under five; ensure childcare policies mandate daily physical activity and adequately resource staff; target caregivers with incentives and messaging to get kids active and be active with them.**

### Public Health & Healthcare Professionals

**Promote physical activity, active play, and reduced screen time as part of early years support programs for families.**

### Parents

**Keep TVs out of bedrooms, institute screen time limits, and create opportunities for active outdoor play for kids and as a family.**

### Early Childhood Educators & Schools

**Train and resource staff; offer a minimum of 90 minutes of daily active play time, indoors and outdoors, structured and unstructured.**

In a 2008 UNICEF study assessing early childhood education and care in economically advanced countries, Canada ranked at the bottom of 25 countries with a key factor reported to be "lack of substantial public investment in education until children reach the age of five."<sup>10</sup>

Although work is ongoing to fill the gap, Canada does not have physical activity guidelines for children under six. While international guidelines vary, the consensus is that all children aged 1-5 years should participate in **at least two hours of physical activity every day, accumulated over many sessions and as part of play, games, transportation and recreation.**<sup>37</sup>



## INFLUENCES

- School
- Family & Peers
- Community & Built Environment
- Policy

## INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

- Disability
- Ethnicity
- Race
- Urban/Rural Living
- Socio-Economic Status
- Gender
- Etc.

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS

- Active Play
- Active Transportation
- Organized Sport & Physical Activity Participation
- Screen Time

## OUTCOMES

- Mental Health
- Body Weight
- Physical Health
- Academic Performance



## The Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card offers the most comprehensive annual assessment of child and youth physical activity in Canada.

We also assess and synthesize current research examining the relationships between individual characteristics and the many influences and outcomes connected to physical activity.

Physical activity levels are broken into the components of active play, active transportation, organized sport and physical activity participation, and screen time. Grades are assigned for each. Influences are broken down into indicators grouped under school, family and peers, community and built environment, and policy. They are graded against their effectiveness in facilitating, promoting, and encouraging physical activity.

Grades are assigned in consideration of disparities that may exist; for example, in assessing many of the indicators, children from low socioeconomic backgrounds are shown to be at a disadvantage against their peers, which will affect the final grade.

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS

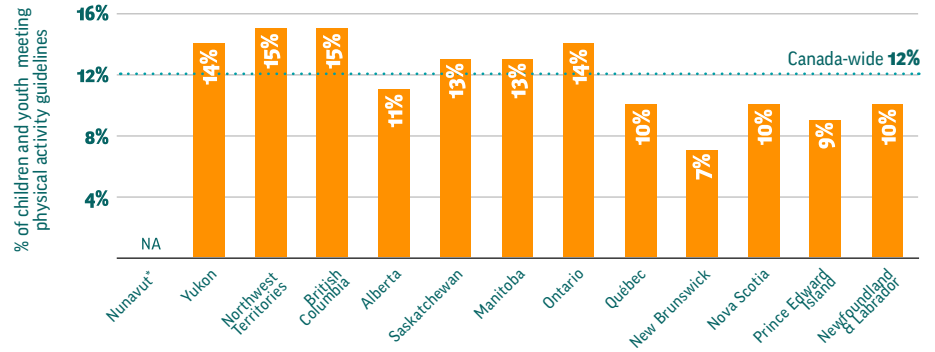
# F

- Objectively measured data indicate only 12% of children and youth are meeting Canada's guidelines of 90 minutes of physical activity a day.<sup>CFLRI</sup>
- The proportion meeting the guidelines has decreased slightly from 13% in 2009, but still registers an increase from 9% in 2007, and 10% in 2008.<sup>CFLRI</sup>

While the lack of upward movement in the overall number of children and youth meeting guidelines is discouraging, there is good and bad news when we delve deeper into the numbers. Canadian Ministers of Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation set a target in 2008 to increase the proportion meeting guidelines to 17% by 2015. Currently, 20% of boys aged 5-10 years and 15% of boys aged 11-14 years are meeting the guidelines, but only 5% of adolescent girls are getting enough activity. When we break down the numbers further and assess against international guidelines, we find that the proportion of children and youth achieving 60 minutes of physical activity a day is 31% – still well below half of Canadian kids.<sup>CFLRI</sup>

## Physical Activity Breakdown By Province & Territory

No provinces or territories are meeting the Canadian physical activity guideline of 90 minutes of daily activity. The long form Report Card includes detailed pages for each province and territory, including step count data and information from representatives on strategies they are each implementing to overcome challenges they face in increasing physical activity in their region.



\* The percentage of children and youth in Nunavut meeting the guideline is not able to be determined due to the small sample size. Data shows that the average number of steps taken by children and youth in Nunavut is 13,012 as compared to the national average of 11,698 steps.<sup>CFMRI</sup>

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS

C

### Organized Sport and Physical Activity Participation

- Children involved in organized sport and physical activity programs have higher overall levels of physical activity.
- Income disparity consistently emerges in relation to organized sport participation. Despite being aimed at lower income families, the Canadian Fitness Tax Credit appears to benefit middle and upper income families more.<sup>234</sup>

F

### Active Play

- 74% of a group of children in Ontario said they would like to do something active after school if they had the choice.<sup>CAPL</sup>
- Children in the early years are increasingly spending a large proportion of their time in daycare settings where active play should be commonplace. However, recent research indicates daycare settings are predominantly sedentary.<sup>25</sup>

D

### Active Transportation

- Children who actively commute to school get more daily physical activity, but regional data show that less than 1/3 of children and youth use active transportation to get to and from school.<sup>243</sup>
- A Quebec study shows those who actively commute in kindergarten have healthier body weights in grades 1 and 2.<sup>147</sup>

F

### Screen Time

- Canadian youth are accumulating 6 hours of screen time on weekdays and over 7 hours on weekend days.<sup>14,52</sup>
- High screen time is associated with reduced academic achievement,<sup>247, 248</sup> as well as high-risk behaviours, such as smoking, drinking and sexual intercourse.<sup>98, 99, 100</sup>

## SCHOOL

C-

### Physical Education

- There are discrepancies between PE time mandated and PE time implemented in schools.
- A US study showed adolescents who participated in PE every day decreased the odds of being overweight as adults by 28%.<sup>156</sup>
- Manitoba is the only province/territory with mandated daily PE up to grade 12.

C

### Sport and Physical Activity Opportunities at School

- In grade 6, 55% of boys and 53% of girls participate in school sports.<sup>TTFM</sup>
- By grade 12, 41% of boys and 27% of girls participate in school sports.<sup>TTFM</sup>

B

### Infrastructure and Equipment

- Provision of equipment and toys can increase physical activity and decrease sedentary time in kids attending preschool or daycare.<sup>163</sup>

C

### School Policy

- Many schools in Canada have school-based policies relating to physical activity, however evidence of **actual** implementation is sparse.

**FAMILY & PEERS**

**D**

**Family Physical Activity**

- Only 27% of parents say they know what Canada's physical activity guidelines are.<sup>CFLRI</sup>
- A US study showed 4-year-old children with household routines of regular family meals, adequate sleep and limited screen time had 40% lower risk of obesity.<sup>172</sup>

**INC**

**Peer Influence**

- While there is not enough evidence to assign a grade, one study found that friends were the most important factor in young women's participation in sport and physical activity.<sup>103</sup> Another study found that 35% of kids cited peers as a reason they enjoy physical activity and sport.<sup>CAPL</sup>

**COMMUNITY & BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

**B**

**Proximity and Accessibility**

- Well over half of Canadians have physical activity facilities nearby and accessible to them.<sup>CFLRI</sup>

**D**

**Usage of Facilities, Programs, Parks, and Playgrounds**

- Less than half of Canadian children and youth use the community physical activity amenities available to them.<sup>CFLRI</sup>

**B+**

**Community Programming**

- Well over half of Canadians agree there are a variety of appropriate programs available in their neighbourhood.<sup>CFLRI</sup>
- 49% of parents agree that cost is a barrier to using them.<sup>CFLRI</sup>

**B**

**Perceptions of Safety and Maintenance**

- Well over half of Canadians perceive their neighbourhood to be safe enough to walk in and engage in other physical activities with their children.<sup>CFLRI</sup>

**D**

**Municipal Policies and Regulations**

- 96% of 24 major municipalities surveyed in Canada have a community-level policy that hinders physical activity participation in children and youth.<sup>244</sup>

**POLICY**

**C+**

**Federal Government Strategies**

- There is no 'stand-alone' strategy focused on physical activity and this is indicative of low priority given to the issue.

**B+**

**Provincial/Territorial Government Strategies**

- Nine of the 13 provinces and territories have developed specific physical activity strategies, one has consultations underway to develop a strategy, and one has a physical activity strategic area included as part of its "Wellness Strategy."<sup>209-219</sup>

**F**

**Federal Government Investment**

- While federal spending in real dollars per capita has risen since 2005, it is still half the amount that it was in 1986.<sup>221</sup>

**C-**

**Provincial/Territorial Government Investment**

- Spending in provinces and territories has been steadily increasing over time and is double what it was in the 1980s in the five provinces where data could be obtained.<sup>238</sup>

**C**

**Industry, Philanthropic, and Research Investments**

- Funding has dropped in many sectors, largely because of the economic downturn.





## The Long Form Report Card, Methodology, Complete Findings & Additional Resources

Our interdisciplinary research team identifies and assesses Report Card indicators to determine grade assignments based on available data, research and key issue areas, and in consideration of prevalence levels, international comparisons, trends over time, disparities (age, geography, etc.), and newly emerging research and initiatives.

The detailed, or long form version, of this Report Card includes background on our methodology and process, in-depth analysis, summaries of key research, charts and figures, provincial-territorial profile pages, and complete references.

Visit [www.activehealthykids.ca](http://www.activehealthykids.ca) to download the long and short versions of the Report Card and access free presentations, articles and media materials that will help you further understand and share the 2010 Report Card findings with others.

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\* The views expressed in the Report Card do not necessarily represent the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

**TOGETHER, WE HAVE  
THE POWER TO  
MOVE KIDS.™**