

Highlights from the 2011 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

School's out, are your children being physically active?

- The after-school period, from 3 to 6 p.m., is prime time for physical activity, yet many Canadian children and youth are sitting idle indoors - only getting 14 minutes (out of a possible 180 minutes) of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity. This means 92 per cent of the after-school time is spent in light or sedentary activities.¹
- The older children get, the less time they spend after school being physically active - children aged five to 12 spend more time playing outside after school than 13- to 17-year-olds.² Furthermore, boys are more likely than girls to engage in physical activity in the after-school period.^{3,4}
- Children aren't being physically active in after-school programs. Seventy-two per cent of Canadian parents report that their children don't have access to a supervised after-school program that encourages physical activity.
- Children are missing out on free time outdoors during 3 to 6 p.m. Outdoor activity, once a key source of children's after-school physical activity, is on the decline, due in part to parental concerns about supervision and safety.

Why is physical activity during after school so crucial?

- As much as 30 per cent of a child's daily physical activity requirement may be attained in the after-school period⁵, so it's ideal for children and youth to take advantage of this free time.
- Physical activity during the after-school period has been shown to be a predictor of higher levels of physical activity during other parts of the day.
- Children and youth who play outdoors after school take 2,000 more steps per day (a total of roughly two kilometers) than those who do not.⁶ Also, exposure to the outdoors and nature while walking or running could decrease levels of anger, anxiety, fatigue and sadness while increasing energy levels.⁷
- Children and youth in supervised after-school programs are less likely to experiment with risky behaviours, such as sexual activity and alcohol or drug use.⁸

¹ Colley RC, Garriguet D, Janssen I, Craig CL, Clarke J, Tremblay MS (2011). *Physical activity of Canadian children and youth: Accelerometer results from the 2007 to 2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey. Health Rep, 22, 1-9.*

² Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (2010). *The 2010 Physical Activity Monitor. Ottawa: Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute.*

³ Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (2010). *The 2010 Physical Activity Monitor. Ottawa: Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute.*

⁴ Colley RC, Garriguet D, Janssen I, Craig CL, Clarke J, Tremblay MS (2011). *Physical activity of Canadian children and youth: Accelerometer results from the 2007 to 2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey. Health Rep, 22, 1-9.*

⁵ Veitch J, Cleland V, Salmon J, Hume C, Timperio A, Crawford D. *Children's and adolescents' physical activity during the critical window: summary report. Burwood, Victoria: Centre for Physical Activity and Nutrition Research. <http://tinyurl.com/4blhwww>.*

⁶ Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (2007). *Kids CAN PLAY! Encouraging children to be active at home, at school, and in their communities. Bulletin no. 3. <http://tinyurl.com/4ubwhpt>.*

⁷ Bowler DE, Buyung-Ali LM, Knight TM, Pullin AS (2010). *A systematic review of evidence for the added benefits to health of exposure to natural environments. BMC Public Health, 10, 456.*

⁸ Harris L, Oman RF, Vesely SK, Tolma EL, Aspy CB, Rodine S, et al. *Associations between youth assets and sexual activity: does adult supervision play a role? Child Care Health Dev. 2007;33:448-454.*

Canadian children are still glued to the screen – especially after school

- For the third year in a row, the 2011 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card assigns an “F” for Screen-Based Sedentary Behaviour (Screen Time in previous report cards) as most Canadian children and youth are still not meeting the recommended guideline of less than two hours a day.
- Seventy-three per cent of parents report their children are watching TV, reading or playing video/computer games after school.⁹
- Children and youth are getting an average of 44 hours of screen time per week - six hours per day on week days and over seven hours on weekend days.¹⁰
- Too much screen time is associated with negative psychological consequences such as reduced academic achievement and sleep, and engagement at a younger age in high-risk behaviours such as smoking, drinking alcohol and having sex.
- Active video gaming is a suitable replacement for sedentary activities, but should not replace outdoor play or physical education.

Canadian youth are too sedentary

- For the fifth year in a row, the 2011 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card assigns an “F” to Physical Activity Levels as only seven per cent of Canadian children and youth meet the new Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines of at least 60 minutes of daily moderate-to vigorous-intensity physical activity.
- Girls are still trailing the boys. Boys continue to be more physically active than girls in every age group – nine per cent of boys and only four per cent of girls meet the new Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines.¹¹
- With 44 per cent of children getting 60 minutes on three days of the week and 80 per cent getting 30 minutes on three days of the week, it's encouraging to see that most Canadian children and youth are getting **some** physical activity, but the challenge is encouraging them to increase both the duration and frequency of their physical activity to meet the new Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines.¹²
- The new Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines suggest that 60 minutes of daily physical activity is the minimum and that ‘more is better’; however, less than two per cent are indeed getting more.¹³
- When comparing physical activity levels of children and youth to other countries, Canada comes out on the bottom. Children and youth from European countries take almost 2,400 more steps per day than children and youth in Canada.¹⁴ Girls in Western Pacific countries take almost 3,400 more steps per day than girls in Canada.¹⁵

⁹ Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (2010). *The 2010 Physical Activity Monitor*. Ottawa: Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute.

¹⁰ HBSC Survey 2005-06

¹¹ Colley RC, Garriguet D, Janssen I, Craig CL, Clarke J, Tremblay MS (2011). *Physical activity of Canadian children and youth: Accelerometer results from the 2007 to 2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey*. *Health Rep*, 22, 1-9.

¹² Colley RC, Garriguet D, Janssen I, Craig CL, Clarke J, Tremblay MS (2011). *Physical activity of Canadian children and youth: Accelerometer results from the 2007 to 2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey*. *Health Rep*, 22, 1-9.

¹³ Colley RC, Garriguet D, Janssen I, Craig CL, Clarke J, Tremblay MS (2011). *Physical activity of Canadian children and youth: Accelerometer results from the 2007 to 2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey*. *Health Rep*, 22, 1-9.

¹⁴ Beets MW, Bornstein D, Beighle A, Cardinal BJ, MorganCF (2010). *Pedometer-measured physical activity patterns of youth: A 13-country review*. *Am J Prev Med*, 38, 208-216.

¹⁵ Beets MW, Bornstein D, Beighle A, Cardinal BJ, MorganCF (2010). *Pedometer-measured physical activity patterns of youth: A 13-country review*. *Am J Prev Med*, 38, 208-216.

Is Canadian society investing enough?

- The grade for Municipal Policies and Regulations is down to a “D-“ this year from a D in 2010. More than 80 per cent of Canadian municipalities do not require safe walking and biking routes when developing new areas or reconstructing new roads. Cities must keep safety in mind when developing sidewalks, paths, parks and the like to allow for more active commuting – especially after school.
- Seventy-two per cent of parents report their children do not have access to supervised after-school programs. Furthermore, those that reported access said fewer than half of the after-school programs had physical activity as the primary purpose.¹⁶ Therefore, it’s important for policymakers to ensure quality control and accessibility of after-school programs.
- For the third year in a row, the grade for Physical Education is a “C-“. Forty-four per cent of Canadian children receive PE at school 1-2 days per week, 25 per cent on 3-4 days of the week, and 22 per cent who receive daily PE. The remaining nine per cent reportedly receive no PE at school.¹⁷ As physical education is essential to the development of children’s movement and motor skills that provide the basis for participation in a variety of activities throughout life, there is a need for novel curricula that increase physical activity time in school.
- While various government strategies have been developed, the 2011 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card gives Federal Government Investments an “F” for the second year in a row as spending at the federal level in real dollars per capita is half of what it was in 1986. Decreases in funding are ongoing – especially to important physical activity promotion organizations.

Parents must help too!

- Parents should target the after-school period for both organized and unorganized activities – encouraging their children to get involved in after-school sports teams as well as encourage after-school active play, which is free, unstructured activity such as dancing with friends at the playground, playing hide and seek, and collecting sticks in the woods.
- Parents should reduce sedentary time during the after-school period and replace it with more active behaviours.
- Almost 62 per cent of parents report their children rely on only inactive modes of transportation to get to and from school¹⁸ (by car being the most popular).¹⁹ Using active transportation to get to and from school is one of the easiest ways to incorporate physical activity into one’s day, so parents should promote active transportation.
- Parents need to keep the TV out of their child’s bedroom, institute screen time limits and create opportunities for active, outdoor play for their children.
- Only 15 per cent of Canadian adults meet the new Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults.²⁰ Therefore, it’s important for parents themselves to get physically active and be good role models for living healthy, physically active lives.

¹⁶ Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (2010). *The 2010 Physical Activity Monitor*. Ottawa: Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute.

¹⁷ Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (2005). *Physical activity programming in the school environment*. Ottawa: Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. tinyurl.com/3qofajr

¹⁸ Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (2005). *The 2005 Physical Activity and Sport Monitor*. Ottawa: Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute. <http://tinyurl.com/68wluqp>.

¹⁹ 2008-09 Family Intervention Survey.

²⁰ Colley RC, Garriguet D, Janssen I, Craig CL, Clarke J, Tremblay MS (2011). *Physical activity of Canadian children and youth: Accelerometer results from the 2007 to 2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey*. *Health Rep*, 22, 1-9.