

IS ACTIVE PLAY EXTINCT?

2012

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



BALL
Child's Toy

active
healthy
kids
CANADA

The Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card

is the most comprehensive
annual assessment of
child and youth physical
activity in Canada.

active
healthy
kids
CANADA

46%

**of Canadian kids get
3 hours or less of
active play per week,
including weekends.**

63%

**of Canadian kids'
free time after school
and on weekends is
spent being sedentary.**

92%

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over watching TV.**

Active Healthy Kids Canada

is the “go-to” source for knowledge, insight and understanding into the complex and multi-faceted issue of child and youth physical activity. We collect, assess and synthesize the most current data and literature examining physical activity levels and the individual characteristics, influences and outcomes that affect those levels.

To build a complete and robust picture, we break our assessment of Physical Activity Levels into the components Organized Sport & Physical Activity Participation, Active Play & Leisure and Active Transportation, with grades assigned for each. Sedentary Behaviours, important factors in overall daily movement, are also graded. Finally, influences, grouped under School & Childcare Settings, Family & Peers, Community & the Built Environment and Policy, are assessed and graded on their engagement and involvement in facilitating, promoting and encouraging physical activity.

Disparities that exist in relation to individual characteristics, such as income, ability level, region, age and gender are considered, and affect the final grades.

A child’s physical activity level affects outcomes such as mental health and body weight; in turn, these outcomes may affect a child’s overall levels of physical activity.



SKIPPING ROPE
Child's Toy



Play has been called the business of childhood.³³

It comes in many forms, but is generally freely chosen, spontaneous, self-directed and fun.³⁴⁻³⁵ Play allows children and youth of all ages to try new things, test boundaries, learn from their mistakes and, perhaps most importantly, enjoy being active. And while active play is fun, it's certainly not frivolous. One Ontario study showed that preschoolers who play outdoors for at least 2 hours a day were far more likely to meet physical activity guidelines.³⁶ **Play has also been shown to foster and improve.**³⁷⁻⁴⁰

- > **Motor function**
- > **Creativity**
- > **Decision-making**
- > **Problem-solving**
- > **Executive functions – the ability to control and direct one's emotions and behaviours**
- > **Social skills – sharing, taking turns, helping others, resolving conflict**
- > **Speech (in preschoolers)**

Unfortunately, the structure and demands of modern Canadian life may be engineering active play out of our children's lives. Perhaps in a misguided bid to protect and direct them at all times, Canadian kids have lost the freedom to throw open the doors and go play.³⁹ **Researchers agree the decline of play over the past 50 or 60 years has been consistent and substantial:**

- > **The proportion of Canadian kids who play outside after school dropped 14% over the last decade.**^{CFLRI}
- > **46% of Canadian kids get 3 hours or less of active play per week, including weekends.**^{CHMS}
- > **Canadian kids are not playing actively in their “free time.” At lunch and after school, kids are getting only 24 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity out of a possible 4 hours.**^{CHMS}

While current crime rates in Canada are about equal to what they were in the 1970s,⁴⁵ the increase in news coverage of crime has fuelled parental fears of letting their children outside.³⁹ 82% of mothers cite safety concerns and almost half of parents cite fear of exposure to child predators as reasons they restrict outdoor play.⁴² 58% of Canadian parents agree they are very concerned about keeping their children safe and feel they have to be “over-protective of them in this world.”⁴⁶

Unfortunately, over-protective parenting, plus the lure of ever-present technology, is driving kids into highly controlled environments, where they have little opportunity to let loose, run around, build, explore and interact with peers on their own terms.

- > **On weekends, when kids should have abundant free time, kids are less active than on weekdays.**²¹
- > **Canadian kids spend 63% of their free time, after school and on weekends, being sedentary.**²¹
- > **Instead of playing outdoors, Canadian kids in Grades 6 to 12 are spending 7 hours and 48 minutes per day in front of screens.**⁴⁷

Even at school, recess is increasingly being threatened by adult beliefs that this “free time” is better spent in academic study.

Not only is there value in this free time, it's what kids want:

- > **In one global study, playing with friends was the single favourite pastime of kids around the world.**⁴⁶
- > **92% of Canadian children said they would choose playing with friends over watching TV.**⁴⁶
- > **Given the choice, 74% of Canadian kids in Grades 4 to 6 would choose to do something active after school, with 31% choosing to play with their friends at the playground.**⁴⁸

Supporting and encouraging opportunities for safe, free, unstructured play, especially outdoors, may be one of the most promising, accessible and cost-effective solutions to increasing child and youth physical activity in Canada.

HOW TO PRESS PLAY

Recommendations for increasing opportunities for active play

EARLY YEARS

- > Provide access to safe, open areas, either indoors or out, where kids can move freely.
- > Add balls and toys to encourage more vigorous play at home, and in childcare and community settings.
- > Get down on the floor and play with them!

SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

- > Provide access to fields, nature, skipping ropes, balls and equipment to facilitate active play.
- > To counter safety concerns, parents and caregivers can take turns supervising kids at play in the park or on the block, encourage kids to play outside with a buddy and consider street-proofing courses.

YOUTH

- > Accept that tweens and teens need free time to play without the assumption they are “up to no good.”
- > Increase youth-friendly play spaces where youth can hang out and direct their own activities.

KIDS OF ALL AGES

- > If your child has no free time, consider reducing the number of scheduled activities.
- > To increase neighbourhood safety, advocate for traffic-calming measures such as speed bumps and roundabouts, which have been shown to decrease pedestrian-vehicle accidents.
- > To reduce screen time, encourage time spent outdoors, every day, instead of in front of TV or video games.

F

Physical Activity Levels

THIS IS THE CORE GRADE IN THE REPORT CARD. Unfortunately, it remains an **F** for the sixth consecutive year, as objectively measured data indicate that only 7% of children and youth are meeting Canada's guidelines of 60 minutes of physical activity a day.^{CHMS}

How far off the mark are we? Achieving the guidelines is essential for health benefits, but it is encouraging to note that 44% of Canadian kids are getting 60 minutes of physical activity on 3 days of the week.⁴⁹

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY	C	<p>Organized Sport & Physical Activity Participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 75% of kids aged 5-19 participate in organized physical activities or sport.^{CFLRI} Kids from higher-income families have a 25% higher participation rate than those from lower-income families.^{CFLRI} One soccer and baseball/softball study found that only 46% of practice time is spent being moderately or vigorously active.⁵³
	F	<p>Active Play & Leisure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 46% of kids aged 6-11 get 3 hours or less of active play (unstructured physical activity) per week, including weekends.^{HBSC}
	D+	<p>Active Transportation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 35% of kids aged 10-16 report using active transportation on the main part of their trip to school (33% walk, 2% bicycle).^{HBSC} The percentage of Canadian kids who walk or wheel to school peaks at age 10 (approximately 35%) and then drops off.⁶⁶
SEDENTARY BEHAVIOUR	F	<p>Screen-Based Sedentary Behaviours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children and youth get an average of 7 hours and 48 minutes of screen time per day.⁴⁷ Only 19% of kids aged 10-16 report meeting Canadian Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines, which recommend no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time per day.^{HBSC}
	INC	<p>Non-Screen Sedentary Behaviours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although it is difficult to separate out non-screen behaviours, kids under age 6 spend 73-84% of their waking hours sedentary, and kids aged 6-19 spend 63% of their free time (after school and weekends) sedentary.¹²⁻¹³ Numerous studies suggest that high levels of sedentary behaviour increase health risks in kids regardless of how active they are.⁹⁵⁻⁹⁹
SCHOOL & CHILDCARE SETTINGS	C	<p>Physical Education (PE)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 67% of schools report that almost all of their students take PE classes from a PE specialist.^{CFLRI} The proportion of students who get the recommended 150 minutes of PE per week ranges from 15-65% across school grades.^{CFLRI}
	B	<p>Sport & Physical Activity Opportunities at School</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More than half of schools in Canada with Grade 6-10 students offer several intramural and interschool sports.^{HBSC} 77% of parents report their schools offer sport or activity programs outside of regular PE classes.^{PAM}
	B+	<p>School Infrastructure & Equipment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 95% of school administrators report that students have regular access to a gymnasium during school hours.^{HBSC} A large majority also report that students have access to outdoor facilities (89%) and gyms (84%) outside of school hours.^{HBSC}
	C-	<p>School Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 54% of middle and high schools have a committee that oversees physical activity policies.^{HBSC} 53% report having improvement plans related to physical activity for the current school year.^{HBSC}

FAMILY & PEERS	D+	<p>Family Physical Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only 15% of Canadian adults are active enough to meet the guideline of 150 minutes of physical activity per week.¹¹⁷ 38% of parents say they often played active games with their children in the past year.^{CFLRI}
	INC	<p>Peer Influence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 55% of middle- and high-school students sometimes lead physical activities at school for their peers and younger students.^{HBSC}
COMMUNITY & THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT	A-	<p>Proximity & Availability of Facilities, Programs, Parks & Playgrounds</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 93% of parents report local availability of public facilities and programs for physical activity.^{CFLRI} Parents from the highest income households report more access to facilities than lowest-income households.^{CFLRI}
	B+	<p>Community Programming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Availability remains high, yet only 51% of municipalities offer programs for youth at risk, 49% offer discounted child fees and 24% target Aboriginal people.^{CFLRI}
	C	<p>Usage of Facilities, Programs, Parks & Playgrounds</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 61% of parents with kids aged 5-17 say they use public facilities and programs for physical activity at least sometimes.^{PAM} An estimated 67% of current facilities need to be repaired or replaced.^{SMG}
	B	<p>Perceptions of Safety & Maintenance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 64% of families agree their neighbourhood is safe for kids to walk to and from school.⁶⁸ In one study, the highest perceived threat to children's safety was traffic, with 47% of parents agreeing it is an issue.⁴⁶
	D	<p>Municipal Policies & Regulations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 45% of municipalities rate opportunities for sport as a high priority for promotion; 39% rate physical activity opportunities as high priority.^{CFLRI}
	INC	<p>Nature & the Outdoors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are limited data on the amount and frequency of outdoor activity in children and youth.
POLICY	D	<p>Federal Government Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once a leader, Canada is falling behind peer countries – Canada currently has no national physical activity strategy. 60% of Canadians think the federal government is not doing enough to deal with the problem of childhood obesity.¹³⁹
	B+	<p>Provincial / Territorial Government Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The majority of Canadian provinces and territories have developed specific physical activity strategies.
	F	<p>Federal Government Investments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 90% of Canadians think the federal government should fund more recreational facilities for youth and make it easier for children to walk and bike daily.¹³⁹
	C-	<p>Provincial / Territorial Government Investments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less than 1% of total healthcare spending in Canada is devoted to health promotion, physical activity/education and sport.¹⁷²
	A-	<p>Non-Government Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the absence of a federal physical activity strategy, the non-government sector has stepped up to fill the void with initiatives such as Active Canada 20/20, a national physical activity strategy and the publication of the Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for the Early Years (0-4).
	INC	<p>Non-Government Investments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sport and recreation organizations received 17% of all volunteer hours in 2007, second only to religious organizations at 18%.^{CSVGP} They received 2% (\$200 million) of all donations given by Canadians.^{CSVGP}

Methodology, Detailed 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 from the past year. Consideration is also given to prevalence levels, international comparisons, trends over time, disparities (age, geography, etc.) and newly emerging initiatives.

The detailed, long-form version of this Report Card includes background on our methodology and process; in-depth analyses; summaries of key research, charts and figures; and complete references.

Visit www.activehealthykids.ca to download the long- and short-form versions of the Report Card and access free presentations, articles and media materials that will help you further understand and share the 2012 Report Card findings with others.



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Aussi disponible en français :
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Active Healthy Kids Canada is a charitable organization that advocates the importance of physical activity for children and youth where they live, learn and play.

Active Healthy Kids Canada relies upon its strategic partners, who play a critical role in the research, content development and communication of the Report Card:



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