

# Have Children in the UAE Deserted Physical Activity?



**United Arab Emirates 2016 Report Card on  
Physical Activity for Children and Adolescents**

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Physical inactivity is one of the most important independent risk factors for future chronic disease.

The Active Healthy Kids United Arab Emirates (AHK UAE) was set-up in 2015 to provide a comprehensive evaluation on how the UAE is performing in supporting and engaging physical activity in children and adolescents.

The AHK UAE is composed of a group of researchers who have collaborated to produce the UAE's inaugural Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Young People in the UAE. This work is part of the *Global Matrix 2.0* on Physical Activity for Children and Youth that compares the physical activity levels of children from 38 different countries across 6 continents.

The primary aim of this report card is to raise awareness of the national physical activity trends and the current state of physical activity opportunities within families, schools, and the community. It is hoped that this report will serve as the foundations of evidence-based interventions and policies aimed at increasing physical activity in both children and adults in the UAE.

# What is the Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance?



The **Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance** organised the **Global Matrix 2.0** project which coordinated Report Cards on the physical activity of children in 38 countries from six continents.

The **Global Matrix 2.0** project aims to consolidate findings from the 38 different countries, analyse global variations in physical activity, and provide recommendations for improving the physical activity grades in all countries.

The **AHKUAE** Report Card provides high-quality representative data from all seven UAE emirates to document the physical levels of UAE children in different domains.

The **Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance** uses a standardised framework based on nine core indicators:

1. Overall Physical Activity
2. Organised Sport Participation
3. Active Play
4. Active Transportation
5. Sedentary Behaviour
6. Family and Peers
7. School
8. Community and the Built Environment
9. Government Strategies and Investments.



The **Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance** uses specific benchmarks for each of the nine core indicators to allow a grade to be awarded corresponding to the proportion of children classified as achieving the benchmark:

**A = 81%-100%** Succeeding with a large majority of UAE children

**B = 61%-80%** Succeeding with more than half of UAE children

**C = 41%-60%** Succeeding with about half of UAE children

**D = 21%-40%** Succeeding with less than half of UAE children

**F = 0%-20%** Succeeding with very few UAE children

**INC = Incomplete Data**

A + or – was assigned to a grade if there were any disparities (e.g. age, gender) in the behaviour or outcome; or there was a changing trend over time.

## Physical Activity Indicators & Benchmarks for the UAE Report Card

Indicator	Benchmark
1. Overall Physical Activity	% of children who meet the current physical activity guidelines (i.e. physically active on all 7 days for $\geq 60$ minutes/day ).
2. Organised Sport Participation	Not included. Lack of robust and representative data.
3. Active Play	Not included. Lack of robust and representative data.
4. Active Transportation	% of children and youth who use active transportation (e.g. walk, cycle) to and from school at least once during the week.
5. Sedentary Behaviour	% of children and youth who meet sedentary behaviour or screen-time guidelines (i.e. $\leq 120$ minutes/day media time).
6. Family and Peers	% of parents who meet the adult physical activity guidelines (i.e. $\geq 30$ minutes of physical activity on $\geq 5$ days/week).
7. School	% of schools where the majority ( $\geq 80\%$ ) of students are offered at least 150 minutes of physical education per week.
8. Community & the Built Environment	Not included. Lack of robust and representative data.
9. Government Strategies & Investments	Evidence of leadership and commitment in providing physical activity opportunities for all children and youth.

# Have Children in the UAE Deserted Physical Activity?

## Physical Activity Indicators & Grades for the UAE Report Card

Indicator	Grade	Headline Results
Overall Physical Activity	D-/F-	Less than 20% of children participate in physical activity for 60 minutes a day 7 days a week
Active Transportation	D-/F-	Less than 20% of children walk or cycle to school on at least one day during the week
Sedentary Behaviour	C-	Greater than 50% of children spend more than 2 hours per day sitting and/or watching television
Family and Peers	C-	Less than 50% of parents participate in 30 minutes of physical activity on at least 5 days of the week
School	D	Only 28% of children participate in at least 150 minutes of physical education lessons per week
Government Strategies & Investments	B+	The UAE Government has invested significant funds and resources into programmes to increase physical activity in both children and adults

## Data Sources

Two major sources of data were used to inform the grades for each physical activity indicator:

- (i) World Health Organisation Global School-based Student Health Survey (UAE-GSHS)
  - Survey of public and private schools from the 7 UAE emirates in 2005 & 2010
- (ii) UAE Indoor Air, Health, and Nutrition Study (UAE-IAHNS)
  - Study of 628 randomly selected households in all 7 UAE emirates in 2009-2010

Both of these studies used nationally representative samples from all 7 UAE emirates.

Numerous school-based research studies providing data on representative samples from single emirates (e.g. Abu Dhabi) were considered during the grading process. See the full scientific paper for more details [www.activehealthykidsuae.ae](http://www.activehealthykidsuae.ae).



### ***Overall Physical Activity = D-/F-***

Data from the UAE-GSHS showed that less than a fifth (19.9% in 2005; 17.2% in 2010) of secondary school-children participated in physical activity for 60 minutes a day 7 days a week. In 2010, only 22.5% of boys and 13.3% of girls achieved the recommended level of physical activity.



### ***Active Transportation = D-/F-***

Data from the UAE-GSHS showed that only a fifth (18.5% in 2005; 20.5% in 2010) of secondary school-children reported walking or cycling to school at least once during the week. In 2010, only 28.7% of boys and 14.7% of girls used active transport during the past week.



### ***Sedentary Behaviour = C-***

Data from the UAE-GSHS showed that only half (61.7% in 2005; 48.7% in 2010) of secondary school-children achieved the American Academy of Paediatrics guideline of limiting total media time (e.g. TV, phone, tablet) to no more than 2 hours per day (45.0% of boys and 56.0% of girls in 2010).



### ***Family and Peers = C-***

Data from the UAE-IAHNS showed that only 41.2% of female adults achieved a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on 5 days each week. The proportion of female adults achieving this recommendation was lowest amongst the poorest (26.5%) and wealthiest (23.2%) households.



### ***School = D***

Data from the 2010 UAE-GSHS showed that only a quarter (27.8%) of secondary school-children went to physical education classes on 3 or more days (~150 minutes) each week during the school year. In 2010, only 29.4% of boys and 26.9% of girls achieved this recommendation.



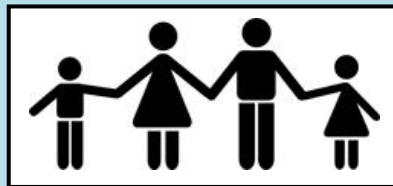
### ***Government Strategies & Investments = B+***

The UAE Government has invested significant funds and resources to implement policies, services, and facilities that will increase physical activity levels in both children and adults across the UAE. Initiatives include healthy school policies mandating compulsory physical education lessons for all students, and redesigning the urban environment and transport infrastructure.

# Recommendations

## *Schools*

- Schools and educational authorities need to ensure that all children participate in a minimum of 150 minutes of physical education classes per week during the school year
- Lessons should maximise the time spent in moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity whilst offering fun, enjoyable, and skill developing activities for both boys and girls
- Physical education curriculums should include cycle proficiency and safety training opportunities, and water confidence activities and swimming skills
- Schools should provide a variety of physical activity-based extracurricular clubs and organised sport teams to promote greater engagement in physical activity participation both within and outside of the school
- Daily school timetables should promote frequent interruptions to prolonged sedentary behaviour by encouraging classroom transitions and break-time play either indoors or outdoors.



## *Parents & Families*

- Local health authorities need to promote increased awareness of the current physical activity and sedentary behaviour recommendations for both children and adults
- Policy makers should develop and implement community-based programmes and interventions that focus on increasing physical activity within families, such as local walking and cycling clubs
- Municipalities should arrange regular community events (e.g. walkathons, fun days) that promote physical across the lifespan from early childhood to late adulthood.

## *Community & the Built Environment*

- Environmental agencies and municipalities should continue to develop and maintain accessible green spaces for all children and adults to interact socially
- Urban planners should continue to re-develop transport infrastructures within communities, districts, and cities to promote active transport across the lifespan.





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The full scientific paper provides further details regarding the methodology and data sources, and includes a more comprehensive review of the key findings related to physical activity disparities (e.g. age, gender, nationality, socioeconomic status, and geographical region). Please visit [www.activehealthykids.org](http://www.activehealthykids.org) to view the full scientific paper. Please contact Dr Tom Loney (email: [tom.loney@uaeu.ac.ae](mailto:tom.loney@uaeu.ac.ae)) for further information.

[www.activehealthykidsuae.ae](http://www.activehealthykidsuae.ae)



## PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES IN THE GLOBAL MATRIX 2.0

**Africa:** Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe

**Asia:** China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Malaysia, Qatar, South Korea, Thailand, United Arab Emirates

**Europe:** Belgium, Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Scotland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Wales

**North America:** Canada, Mexico, United States

**Oceania:** Australia, New Zealand

**South America:** Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Venezuela

# GLOBAL MATRIX 2.0

## on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

[www.activehealthykids.org](http://www.activehealthykids.org)

**6 CONTINENTS. 38 COUNTRIES. 342 GRADES.**

Join us at the 6th International Congress on Physical Activity and Public Health in Bangkok, Thailand on November 16th, 2016 as we release a matrix of grades, showing how 38 countries measure up on child and youth physical activity. Visit [www.activehealthykids.org](http://www.activehealthykids.org) after November 16th to view the grades, country report cards and related peer-reviewed publications.

