

Pandemic-Related Challenges & Opportunities for Physical Activity

We're only beginning to understand how COVID-19 has impacted the health and movement behaviours of children (5–11 years) and youth (12–17 years) in Canada.

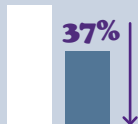
These **four key grades** from the **2022 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth** highlight how many structured opportunities to get active and play were lost during the pandemic, but many families and community leaders still found ways to get kids active.



Overall Physical Activity

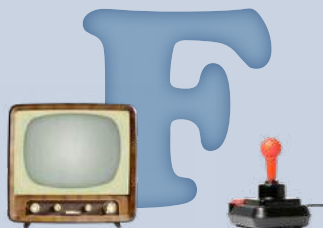


Only **17.5%** of children met the moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) recommendation of 60 mins/day at the height of the pandemic.¹



The percentage of youth meeting the MVPA recommendation dropped from **51%** pre-pandemic to **37%** during the pandemic.¹

Sedentary Behaviours



16.5% of children met the screen time recommendation of 2 hours/day at the start of the pandemic.^{2,3}



Only **3%** of youth met the screen time recommendation of 2 hours/day at the start of the pandemic.⁴

Active Transportation



46% of parents indicated that their children either solely commute actively to school or commute partially in an active way.⁵

Active Play



25% of children and youth achieved >840 mins/week (>2 hours/day on average) of total time engaged in indoor and outdoor unstructured play.⁵



At the height of the pandemic, children's and youth's time spent outdoors and engaged in active play increased compared to the start of the pandemic but was still below pre-pandemic levels.³

References

- 1 Watt & Colley. (2021). Youth – but not adults – reported less physical activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. StatCan COVID-19: Data to Insights for a Better Canada. Catalogue no. 45-28-0001.
- 2 Moore et al. (2020). Impact of the COVID-19 virus outbreak on movement and play behaviours of Canadian children and youth: A national survey. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 17(1):1.
- 3 Moore et al. (2021). Few Canadian children and youth were meeting the 24-hour movement behaviour guidelines 6 months into the COVID-19 pandemic: Follow-up from a national study. *Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism*, 46(10):1225–40.
- 4 2020–21 COMPASS, University of Waterloo. Custom Analysis.
- 5 2021–2022 Parent Survey on Physical Activity and Sport, CFLRI. Custom Analysis.



Read the ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth to learn more.

Tips to help your kids get more active!

Many parents and caregivers found ways to get their kids active during the pandemic, but what can we do to keep up this momentum moving forward?

The 2022 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth contains a number of recommendations for parents and caregivers.



Overall Physical Activity



Continue to promote physical activity early and often while identifying many ways to incorporate daily physical activity.



Be active as a family – this encourages physical activity, social support, connectedness and attachment, which are all important for mental health.

Sedentary Behaviours



Involve all family members in creating a family media plan that includes setting limits around screen viewing, prioritizing screen-free family time, removing screens from children’s bedrooms and having screen-free family meals.

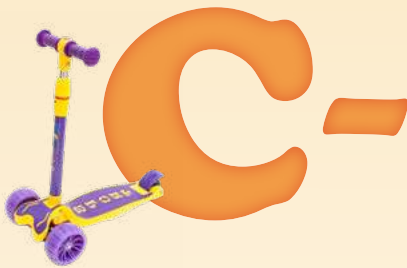


Be mindful of your own time spent on screens, as this may influence other family members’ screen time behaviour.



Be present and engaged when using screens, and co-view when possible.

Active Transportation



Consider letting your kids walk, wheel or cycle to destinations within a few kilometers of home.



Incorporate more opportunities for active transportation – walk, bike, wheel, skateboard, scooter or take transit to school, stores, parks and activities.



Allow your children to play and roam unsupervised while ensuring that their range is safe.

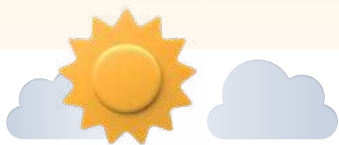
Active Play



Support outdoor – and, when possible, nature-based – play opportunities since they are linked to increased physical activity levels and improved mental health outcomes.



Nurture frequent active play opportunities. Since children learn through play, this will not only support their development but will also keep them healthy.



Read the ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth to learn more.

How can schools and educators support kids' physical activity?

When in-person physical education classes and sport competitions came to a halt during the height of the pandemic, many schools and educators adapted and found creative ways to get children and youth active. How can they maintain this momentum going forward?

The **2022 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth** contains a number of recommendations for schools and educators to help improve four key grades.



Overall Physical Activity



Incorporate different types of movement throughout the school day and into homework whenever possible.



Where appropriate, consider including movement-based learning activities (including standing) and outdoor lessons into the school day to further support students' health and well-being.

Sedentary Behaviours



Break up periods of extended sedentary behaviour with both scheduled and unscheduled movement breaks:

- At least once every 30 minutes for students ages 5–11 years
- At least once every hour for students ages 12–18 years



Limit sedentary homework to no more than 10 minutes per day, per grade level.



When school-related screen time is required:

- Limit time spent on devices, especially for students 5–11 years of age.
- Take a device break at least once every 30 minutes.
- Discourage media-multitasking in the classroom and while doing homework.
- Encourage students to avoid screen-based homework within an hour of bedtime.

Active Transportation



Develop a school travel plan that encourages children to use active modes of transportation in order to reduce traffic, motor vehicle accidents and air pollution exposure.



Consider promoting “walking school buses” (groups of children walking to school with one or more adults) to help families adopt active transportation while sharing the responsibility among parents/guardians.

Active Play



Use the international consensus definitions on outdoor play, learning and teaching recently released by the [Play, Learn and Teach Outdoors Network \(PLaTO-Net\)](#) to define outdoor play.



Nurture frequent active play opportunities. Since children learn through play, this will not only support their development but will also keep them healthy.



[Read the ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth to learn more.](#)

How can governments get kids moving more?

It's clear that the necessary measures taken during the height of the pandemic affected the movement behaviours of children and youth across the country. What can we do going forward to ensure our kids have an active and healthy future?

The **2022 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth** contains a number of recommendations for governments.



Overall Physical Activity



Continue to commit funding to the surveillance of physical activity in children and youth by province/territory.



Increase health promotion efforts to address the COVID-19-related decline in physical activity, especially in equity-deserving groups that have been disproportionately impacted.



Provide sustained resources and develop policies for promoting and implementing the 24-Hour Movement Guidelines.

Sedentary Behaviours

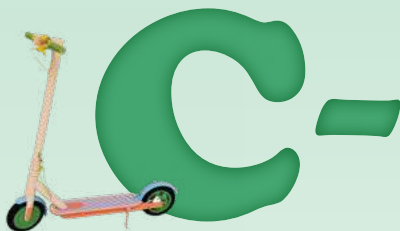


Increase health promotion efforts to support families in reversing increases in screen time due to pandemic-related restrictions.



Require digital screen device manufacturers to disclose on product labels the potential harms linked with excessive use.

Active Transportation



Create a culture of active transportation. This may involve alleviating parental safety concerns (e.g., being hit by a motor vehicle) by informing them of the low risks involved.



Provide infrastructure and social marketing to support families in adopting active transport practices.



Continue to increase the number of traffic control devices (e.g., traffic lights, signs, crosswalks), enforce lower speeds around schools and increase supervision (e.g., traffic guards) to address safety concerns.

Active Play



Invest in no-charge active play spaces (especially outdoors) for families with children of all ages.



Support families' participation in sport and recreation activities.



Read the ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth to learn more.