



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Canadian children and youth receive failing grade for physical activity levels as screen time replaces active play

Active Healthy Kids Canada Releases 2008 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

Toronto (ONTARIO) May 27, 2008 – According to the 2008 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, released today by Active Healthy Kids Canada and its partners Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute – Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group (CHEO-HALO) and ParticipACTION, a staggering 90 per cent of Canadian children and youth are still failing to meet the guidelines outlined in Canada's Physical Activity Guides for Children and Youth, earning an F grade for the second year in a row.

And "screen time" is one of the key culprits. The 2008 Report Card also assigned an F grade to the proportion of children and youth meeting Canada's screen time guidelines, down from a D- in 2007. Instead of being physically active, young Canadians are spending an alarming amount of time in front of television, computer and video screens. In fact, the average child aged 10 to 16-years-old reports screen time up to three times longer than recommended guidelines. Children in this age group are typically spending six hours a day in front of some type of screen, which is the equivalent to 42 hours a week or more than a parent's full work week. And, it's not just children and youth. The Report Card revealed that preschool-aged children are not following their recommended screen times with many spending two hours a day in front of a screen.

"The results of the Report Card are very disturbing. This trend of extreme inactivity in today's children and youth will have an enormous impact on their development and potentially lead to long-term health issues including diabetes, cardio vascular disease and a range of chronic degenerative conditions," says Dr. Mark Tremblay, Chief Scientific Officer, Active Healthy Kids Canada. "Given that screen time has been revealed as a major contributor to inactivity, it's critical that children and youth turn off the gadgets and get moving."

"At a younger and younger age, children are becoming dependent on electronic devices as their sources of entertainment and activity," says Michelle Brownrigg, Chief Executive Officer, Active Healthy Kids Canada (Toronto). "Getting our children active needs to be a collaborative effort. Governments, industry, communities, schools and parents all need to share the responsibility of replacing sedentary time with active play."

The 2008 Report Card includes key recommendations for parents, schools, community leaders, policy-makers, researchers and physicians to become actively involved in the battle against youth physical inactivity including: reducing screen time; creating as many opportunities for free play as possible; and not relying on 'active' video games to get children moving. Without this collaborative effort to promote and encourage physical activity, our children and youth will face major health issues in the short and long-term.

"This year's report card confirms that our inactivity levels will have an unimaginable impact on our health, economy and society in general," says Kelly Murumets, President and CEO, ParticipACTION. "Becoming physically active does not have to be difficult. Children simply have to be encouraged and supported to move more in all aspects of their day."

In recent years, awareness and support has been growing for taking on the issue of improving physical activity levels among children and youth, but the Report Card calls for even more attention to this issue. Provincial governments and the Government of Canada have become more involved by renewing funding to re-instate ParticipACTION and investing in regional policy and program initiatives, but the Report Card highlights the need for strategic and sustained efforts to bring about measurable change.

The Report Card also assigned the following grades:

- A “D” to family perceptions and roles regarding physical activity
- A “D” to the proportion of children and youth actively commuting to and from school regularly
- A “B” to parental support and encouragement of physical activity
- A “D” to the proportion of children actually using parks and playgrounds on a regular basis
- A “D” to the existence of by-laws hindering physical activity
- A “C” to sport participation in 15-18 year olds

About The Report Card

The 2008 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, conducted by Active Healthy Kids Canada was developed in collaboration with other organizations to build and enhance its foundation as a credible knowledge source and to effectively disseminate evidence-informed communications across the sector. CHEO-HALO worked with Active Healthy Kids Canada’s research group to lead the coordination, data collection and data analysis necessary to develop the Report Card and provided access to the latest research findings. ParticipACTION provided communications support for the Report Card. A full copy of the report can be found at www.activehealthykids.ca.

About Active Healthy Kids Canada

Active Healthy Kids Canada was established as a charitable organization in 1994 to advocate the importance of physical activity for children and youth where they live, learn, and play. As a national leader in this area, Active Healthy Kids Canada advances knowledge to influence decision - makers at all levels, from policy - makers to parents, in order to increase the attention given to, investment in, and effective implementation of physical activity opportunities for all Canadian children and youth.

About CHEO-HALO

Responding to an alarming rise in childhood obesity, the Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group (HALO) has been established to provide national leadership and research excellence for the prevention and treatment of obesity in children and youth. This centre of excellence is comprised of a multidisciplinary group of research scientists, clinicians, and research staff who are working with local, provincial and national partners to address obesity and inactivity in children and youth. Located in the Research Institute of the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, HALO is developing and testing innovative treatments and prevention strategies for the health and wellness of our most precious resource, our children.

About ParticipACTION

ParticipACTION is the national voice of physical activity and sport participation in Canada. Originally established in 1971, ParticipACTION was re-launched in 2007 to help prevent the looming inactivity and obesity crisis that faces Canada. As a national not-for-profit organization solely dedicated to inspiring and supporting healthy and active living for Canadians, it works with its partners, which include sport, physical activity, recreation organizations, government and corporate sponsors, to inspire and support Canadians to move more. ParticipACTION is generously supported by Sport Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada. For more information, visit www.participACTION.com

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