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Inactive kids under five demonstrating dangerous lifestyle habits

Active Healthy Kids Canada Releases 2010 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

TORONTO (ONTARIO) APRIL 27, 2010 – If you think of curious, busy preschoolers as “active,” you may want to think again.

According to the 2010 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, Canadian kids five and younger are dangerously physically inactive. Healthy habits must start young, as lifestyle patterns set in the early years predict obesity and health outcomes in later childhood, and even through adulthood. The Report Card was released today by Active Healthy Kids Canada and its strategic partners, ParticipACTION and the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) Research Institute – Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group (HALO).

“We already know that the early years are a critical period of growth and development, but growing evidence tells us that physical activity must be a fundamental part of the early-life experience,” says Dr. Mark Tremblay, Chief Scientific Officer, Active Healthy Kids Canada, and Director of HALO. “Studies show that children who are obese before six are likely to be obese later in childhood, and it’s estimated that overweight two- to five-year-olds are four times as likely to become overweight as adults. Preschool obesity is on the rise in Canada, yet we do not have physical activity guidelines for children five and under.”

The sixth annual Report Card reveals that less than half of Canadian kids under five are getting regular physical activity as part of their daily routines. Although international recommendations vary, children between the ages of one and five should participate in at least two hours of physical activity each day, accumulated over many sessions through play, games, active transportation and recreation.

“Active play may be fun, but it’s not frivolous,” says Dr. Tremblay. “In the early years, active play is required for healthy development, as it builds confidence and basic movement skills, and fosters social interaction, imaginations and self-esteem.”

Unfortunately, Canadian kids of all ages continue to spend more time on the couch than on the playground, resulting in an F grade for Screen Time for the third year in a row. Disturbingly, 90 per cent of children begin watching TV before their second birthday, even though it is recommended that children under age two get zero screen time. Despite the negative impact of early childhood screen exposure, new e-parenting products continue to surface, and a recent survey shows that four of the 10 best-selling education apps in the iTunes store are aimed at children under four.

As our youngsters age, their physical activity levels are not improving. For the fourth year in a row, the Report Card assigns an F for Physical Activity Levels, as only 12 per cent of Canadian children and youth are meeting Canada’s physical activity guidelines of 90 minutes a day. This year, we see no forward movement towards meeting targets of 17 per cent by 2015, as set out by provincial and territorial government ministers responsible for physical activity, recreation and sport. For the first time, this year’s Report Card includes physical activity trends across each province and territory.

Also for the first time, this year’s Report Card assigns an F for Federal Government Investment, down from last year’s C grade for Federal Government Strategies and Investments.

“A new paper tells us that federal government spending on physical activity has declined dramatically since the 1980s,” says Michelle Brownrigg, CEO of Active Healthy Kids Canada. “While we are seeing some success stories and some national commitments to encouraging sport and activity, spending at the federal level in real dollars per capita is half the amount that it was in 1986. We need to follow Michelle Obama’s lead with the *Let’s Move* campaign and put child and youth inactivity higher on the national agenda.”

Physically active kids grow into strong, healthy adults. With healthcare costs spiraling upwards in Canada, it is essential that our society build the foundation for a healthier, more active population by supporting and encouraging families, at all levels, to get their kids moving.

“As parents, we have the power to influence the long-term health of our kids through physical activity,” says Kelly Murumets, President and CEO, ParticipACTION. “We can put our children and youth on the path to active lives by encouraging household habits that limit screen time, include outdoor play and build family time around moving more.”

Among the 21 grades assigned in the Report Card, key grades include:

- “F” for Active Play
- “C-“ for Physical Education
- “D” for Family Physical Activity
- “B“ for Proximity and Accessibility to physical activity facilities
- “D” for Usage of Facilities, Programs, Parks and Playgrounds

About the Report Card

The Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth is the most comprehensive annual assessment of child and youth physical activity in Canada. The Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute’s Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group (www.cheori.org/halo), established to provide national leadership and research excellence for the prevention and treatment of obesity in children and youth, works with our Research Work Group to lead the coordination, data collection and analysis necessary to develop the Report Card, and provide access to the latest research findings. ParticipACTION (www.ParticipACTION.com), the national voice of physical activity and sport participation, provides communications management to produce and deliver the Report Card. Full copies of the short form and long form Report Card, plus free presentations, articles and media materials, can be found at www.activehealthykids.ca.

About Active Healthy Kids Canada

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. 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. Production of the Report Card is possible through financial support from the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Lawson Foundation, Kellogg’s, George Weston Limited and the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

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For more information, copies of the Report Card, provincial/territorial breakdown pages or b-roll, to schedule an interview or speak to a spokesperson, please contact:

Katherine Janson, ParticipACTION
(416) 913-1471 / kjanson@participACTION.com

Nina Kalos, Hill & Knowlton Canada
(416) 413-4642 / nina.kalos@hillandknowlton.ca