

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

From desk to couch: Canadian children and youth missing out on prime physical activity time after school

Active Healthy Kids Canada releases 2011 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

TORONTO (ONTARIO) APRIL 26, 2011 – School's out, do you know what your kids are doing? You may want to think again if you believe they are being physically active.

The 2011 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth reports that during the after-school period, from approximately 3 to 6 p.m., Canadian children and youth are sitting idle indoors – getting a mere 14 minutes, out of a possible 180, of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity. It is important to reverse this trend as research shows that children and youth who are physically active during this time improve their overall daily physical activity levels and health. 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).

“Simply put, the after-school period represents an underutilized opportunity for children and youth to gain emotional and physical health benefits through physical activity,” says Dr. Mark Tremblay, Chief Scientific Officer, Active Healthy Kids Canada, and Director of HALO. “Teens involved in supervised after-school programs, for instance, are less likely to experiment with risky behaviours, including drugs and alcohol. Time spent being active outdoors after school lowers levels of anxiety, anger, fatigue and sadness. The science and benefits are clear; we need to re-establish the healthy practice of after-school physical activity in our communities.”

Issues like safety and lack of access to physical activity areas and programs cannot be ignored as barriers to active after-school play. While 73 per cent of Canadian parents admit that their children are sedentary after school (mostly indulging in excessive screen time), 72 per cent of parents state that their children do not have access to a supervised, after-school program encouraging physical activity. Also, safety concerns contribute to parents preventing their children from participating in outdoor physical activity after school. As Canadian children and youth grow older, time spent playing outdoors diminishes almost by half. The result is that they become glued to the screen – dramatically exceeding the guideline of two hours per day – and consequently receiving an “F” grade for Screen Time in this year's Report Card.

“Right now, kids are spending over 40 hours a week in front of screens,” says Dr. Tremblay. “These alarming numbers equate to a very sedentary child, so we must transform the after-school hours into healthy active living time.”

For the fifth year in a row, the Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card assigns an “F” to Physical Activity Levels as only seven per cent of Canadian youth and children meet the new Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines of at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity per day. This statistic puts Canada at the bottom in comparison to European and Western Pacific countries. European children and youth take about 2,400 steps more per day than Canadian children and youth.

Boys continually prove to be more active than girls with nine per cent meeting the guidelines versus only four percent of girls. With such low numbers meeting the guidelines, it is important to examine how far off Canadian children really are. Forty-four per cent of children are getting 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity on three days of the week and 80 per cent are getting 30 minutes. It is promising to see that most Canadian children and youth are getting at least some physical activity; however, the challenge moving forward is encouraging them and creating the resources so they can increase their duration and frequency of activity.

While various government strategies have been developed, the 2011 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card gives Federal Government Investments an “F” for the second year in a row as spending at the federal level in real dollars per capita is half of what it was in 1986.

“Important physical activity promotion organizations are really feeling the government cuts to physical activity,” says Yvette Munro, Vice-Chair, Active Healthy Kids Canada. “Considering the critical need for a resolution to the youth inactivity crisis in our country and the importance of the overall, long-term health of our children and youth, there must be more advocacy programs in place to ensure the federal government is held accountable. This continued decrease in funding directly affects national policy development, program development and implementation, and public education on the necessity of daily physical activity.”

There is also a need for educational institutions to implement after-school programs and policies – recruiting parents, educators and caregivers to participate and provide suitable activities that are attractive for varied abilities, genders and age groups. Additionally, it is necessary to ensure quality control of the after-school programs that do exist, not just for safety, but also to make sure physical activity is a prominent component.

“Parents and caregivers play an important role in helping to change our children’s after-school habits,” says Kelly Murumets, President and CEO, ParticipACTION. “Support can be as simple as encouraging your child to try out for sports teams, using active transportation as much as possible, restricting television viewing, video and computer games during the after-school period, or making the playground, instead of the couch, an after-school destination. As parents and caregivers, we are the role models for our children; we must set higher standards for our own physical activity levels if we wish to see results in our children.”

Among the 23 grades assigned in the Report Card, key grades include:

- “F” for Active Play
- “D” for Active Transportation
- “C-“ for Physical Education
- “D+” for Family Physical Activity
- “D-“ for Municipal Policies and Regulations

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 Lawson Foundation, George Weston Limited, the Public Health Agency of Canada, Kellogg's, and the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

-30-

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

Laura Teed, Hill & Knowlton Canada
(416) 413-4610 / laura.teed@hillandknowlton.ca