

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Fossilized playgrounds: is active play the next dinosaur?

### *Active Healthy Kids Canada releases 2012 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth*

**TORONTO (ONTARIO) MAY 29, 2012** – Have you noticed parks, playgrounds and neighbourhood streets are not bustling with kids playing like they used to be? Once known as a regular part of a child’s day, active play is now on the brink of becoming extinct.

Play comes in many forms, but it is generally freely chosen, spontaneous, self-directed and fun. The 2012 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth reports that Canadian children and youth are not playing enough; assigning an “F” grade for Active Play and Leisure. Forty-six per cent of Canadian kids are getting a mere three hours or less of active play per week, including weekends.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, kids spend 63 per cent of their free time after school and on weekends being sedentary.<sup>2</sup> This is alarming news, as active play is a promising, accessible and cost-effective solution to help Canadian children and youth meet the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines.

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).

“Unstructured play is declining with each generation, and this is having a negative effect on the health and wellness of our children and youth,” says Dr. Mark Tremblay, Chief Scientific Officer, Active Healthy Kids Canada, and Director of HALO. “Kids of all ages should have regular opportunities for active play, where they can let loose, explore, run, climb, crawl and play in parks with friends, like their parents once did. Active play is fun, but it is also shown to improve a child’s motor function, creativity, decision-making, problem-solving and social skills.”

Barriers, including screen time and parental safety concerns, force children and youth into highly-controlled environments, where they have little opportunity for active play. Fifty-eight per cent of Canadian parents say they are very concerned about keeping their children safe and feel they have to be over-protective of them.<sup>3</sup> Safety concerns, whether or not they are founded, such as crime, traffic, neighbourhood danger, outdoor darkness and lack of supervision, discourage parents from letting their children and youth play outdoors.<sup>4</sup> Instead, they are lured to the increasingly ever-present screen – Canadian kids are spending seven hours and 48 minutes per day in front of screens, dramatically exceeding the guideline of no more than two hours per day.<sup>5</sup> Even at school, recess is increasingly being threatened by adult beliefs that free time is better spent in academic study.

<sup>1</sup> 2007-09 Canadian Health Measures Survey, Statistics Canada.

<sup>2</sup> Garriguet D, Colley RC (2012). Daily patterns of physical activity participation in Canadians. *Health Reports*, 23(2):1-6.

<sup>3</sup> IKEA (2010). *Playreport: international summary research results*. URL: [www.slideshare.net/dinomondon/ikea-playreport-international-summary](http://www.slideshare.net/dinomondon/ikea-playreport-international-summary). Accessed 27 Mar 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Glenn NM, Knight CJ (2012). *Children’s views about the meanings of play*. *WellSpring*, 23(1). URL: [www.centre4activeliving.ca/publications/wellspring/2012/feb-child-play.pdf](http://www.centre4activeliving.ca/publications/wellspring/2012/feb-child-play.pdf). Accessed 27 Mar 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Leatherdale ST, Ahmed R (2011). *Screen-based sedentary behaviours among a nationally representative sample of youth: are Canadian kids couch potatoes?* *Chronic Dis Inj Can*, 31(4):141-46.

“Children today spend considerably less time playing outdoors than their parents did as children,” says Elio Antunes, CEO, Active Healthy Kids Canada. “We can’t return to a simpler time, but we can work together as a society to protect, support and promote active play as a fun and fundamental part of the Canadian childhood experience.”

To ensure Canadian children of all ages have opportunities for active play, parents and caregivers can encourage children to choose active play over more sedentary behaviours, such as sitting in front of screens. After school and weekends are opportune times to encourage active play, especially outdoors. An additional benefit for parents is that active play does not have to cost anything. To address safety concerns, parents and caregivers can take turns supervising and playing with children outdoors or encourage kids to play with a buddy. Given the opportunity, kids want to play – 92 per cent of Canadian kids said they would choose playing with friends over watching TV.<sup>6</sup>

“Play has been called the business of childhood, because it is what our children and youth should be spending their time doing,” says Kelly Murumets, President and CEO, ParticipACTION. “We have a responsibility to get out of our children’s way and give them the time, space and freedom to run around, direct their own activities and learn from their mistakes. The reward will be increased confidence, a sense of adventure and, perhaps most importantly, a love for being active.”

Among the 24 grades assigned in the Report Card, key grades include:

- “F” for Active Play & Leisure
- “F” for Physical Activity Levels
- “F” for Screen-Based Sedentary Behaviours
- “D+” for Active Transportation
- “D+” for Family Physical Activity
- “F” for Federal Government Investments
- “C-” for Provincial/Territorial Government Investments

### ***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. Active Healthy Kids Canada works with its strategic partners to develop and disseminate the Report Card. The Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute’s Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group (CHEO-HALO), works with our Research Work Group to lead the coordination, data collection and analysis necessary to develop the Report Card, and provides access to the latest research findings. ParticipACTION provides communications management to produce and deliver the Report Card. Production of the Report Card is possible through support from The Lawson Foundation, the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, George Weston Limited and Kellogg’s. 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](http://www.activehealthykids.ca). For more information on CHEO-HALO, please visit [www.haloresearch.ca](http://www.haloresearch.ca). For more information on ParticipACTION, please visit [www.participACTION.com](http://www.participACTION.com).

### ***About Active Healthy Kids Canada***

Established in 1994, Active Healthy Kids Canada strives to be a trusted source for “powering the movement to get kids moving.” Advancing knowledge is the cornerstone of our business, providing the evidence base

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<sup>6</sup> IKEA (2010). *Playreport: international summary research results*. URL: [www.slideshare.net/dinomonon/ikea-playreport-international-summary](http://www.slideshare.net/dinomonon/ikea-playreport-international-summary). Accessed 27 Mar 2012.



for our communications and issue advocacy work to increase support for quality, accessible and enjoyable physical activity participation experiences for young people across Canada. In an ongoing effort to advance knowledge to effect change, we release the annual Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, a comprehensive assessment of the current state of physical activity among Canadian children and youth. For more information, please visit [www.activehealthykids.ca](http://www.activehealthykids.ca)

-30-

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