

ARE WE **DRIVING** OUR KIDS
TO **UNHEALTHY HABITS?**

2013 Active Healthy Kids Canada
Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth



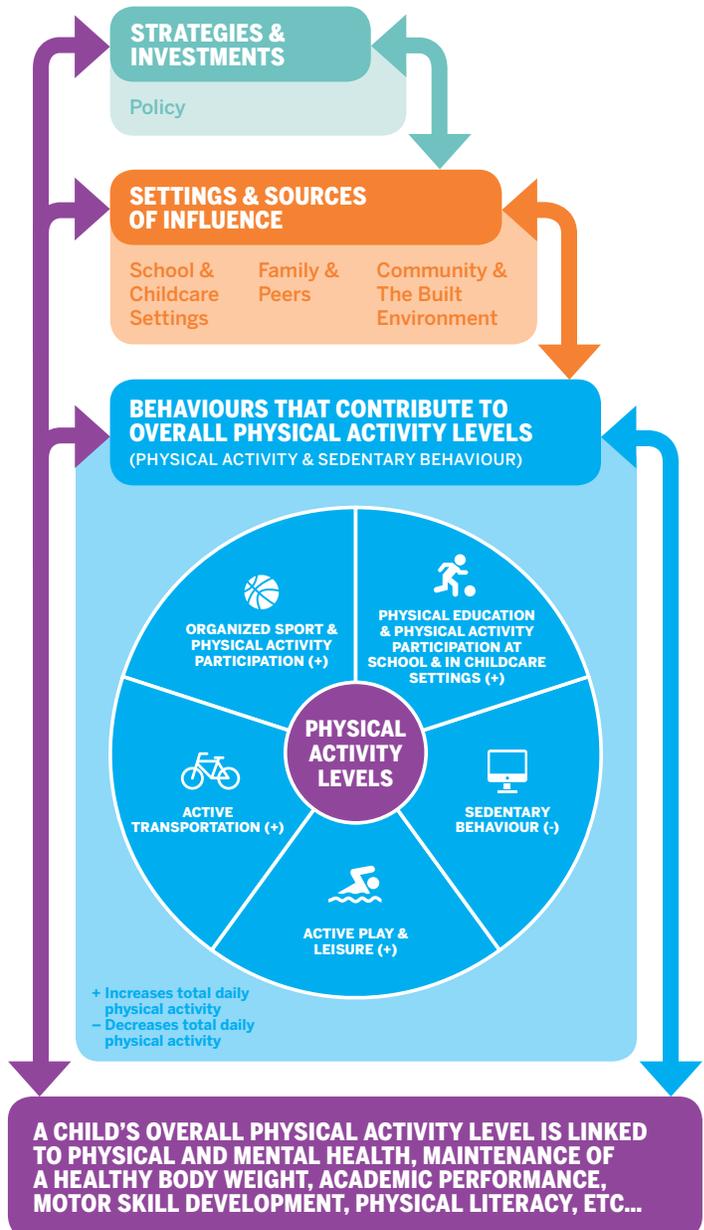
ACTIVE HEALTHY KIDS CANADA

is a national charitable organization established in 1994 with a mission to inspire the country to engage all children and youth in physical activity. We provide knowledge and expertise to support action that will build better programs, and will enhance campaigns and policies that increase physical activity opportunities for Canadian children and youth. Our vision is to create a nation of active healthy kids.

The 2013 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth is the 9th annual edition and provides the most current and comprehensive assessment of the physical activity of children and youth in Canada. In past years, the Report Card has proven useful as an advocacy tool serving as the basis for media coverage, public debate, policy discussion and change, research proposals, academic publications, local and international research conferences, communications campaigns, funding decisions and general discourse. The 2013 Report Card is a source for knowledge, insight and understanding that influences thinking and action among issue stakeholders.

2013 REPORT CARD

Common to any report card are the grades. The 2013 Report Card assigns letter grades to 17 different indicators that are grouped into three categories (see below): **Strategies & Investments** (Policy), **Settings & Sources of Influence** (School & Childcare Settings, Family & Peers, Community & the Built Environment), and the **Behaviours that Contribute to Overall Physical Activity Levels** (Active Play & Leisure, Physical Education and Physical Activity Participation at School & in Childcare Settings, Sedentary Behaviour, Organized Sport & Physical Activity Participation, Active Transportation). A child's physical activity level affects outcomes such as mental health and body weight; in turn, these outcomes may affect a child's overall levels of physical activity. **Letter grades are based on an examination of current data for each indicator against a benchmark along with an assessment of trends over time, international comparisons and the presence of disparities** (e.g., age, gender, disability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status). Together, the indicators provide a complete and robust assessment of how we are doing as a country in promoting and facilitating physical activity opportunities among children and youth in Canada.



ARE WE DRIVING OUR KIDS TO UNHEALTHY HABITS?

Active transportation – walking, biking, in-line skating and skateboarding to get to and from places such as school, parks and shops – has long been known to be an important source of physical activity for children and youth.¹⁴⁻¹⁷ If children walked for all trips of less than one kilometre rather than being driven, they would take an average of 2,238 additional steps per day!¹⁷ This translates to approximately 15-20 minutes of walking and thus has the potential to make a substantial contribution to the 60 minutes of daily physical activity kids need for overall health. Imagine the potential impact this small change could have on increasing overall physical activity levels in Canadian kids!

One of the great things about active transportation is that it can be easily integrated into everyday life with little or even no cost. And its benefits are significant. Active transportation could help to reverse the recent decline in rates of walking and biking for transportation, and thus presents a major opportunity for improving health among children and youth. Research suggests that, given the choice, most children would prefer to walk or bike to school rather than take a bus or be driven by their parents.¹⁸

In addition to improving overall physical health, active transportation may:¹⁹⁻²⁶

- › **Improve fitness and heart health**
- › **Increase academic achievement**
- › **Provide social opportunities**
- › **Reduce stress**
- › **Improve air quality and reduce risk of lung diseases (e.g., asthma)**

Kids who use active transportation to get to and from school can accumulate up to 45 more minutes daily of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity compared to kids who get to school via car, train or bus.¹⁵ These kids tend to be more active across the whole day, not just during the school commute.¹⁵ Driving our kids to and from school may be robbing them of an important source of daily physical activity.

HOW MANY CHILDREN ENGAGE IN ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION?

In Canada, a recent survey found that although 58% of parents walked to school when they were kids, only 28% of their children walk to school today.²⁷ In just one decade (2000 to 2010), the proportion of 5- to 17-year-olds using only inactive modes of transportation (e.g., bus, train, car) to get to and from school has increased from 51% to 62%.²⁸ Many different data sources in different age groups suggest that only 25-35% of Canadian children and youth walk, bike or wheel to and from school.²⁷⁻³⁰ This percentage increases with age during elementary school, but then decreases as children move to secondary school.³⁰ In youth aged 15-17, the daily time spent walking decreased from 17 to 11 minutes between 1992 and 2010; this decline was particularly evident in girls.²⁹

There are also large regional variations in the percentage of children who use active transportation. For example:

- › Walking is the most common travel mode among elementary schoolchildren in inner-city Toronto, but children and youth from suburban areas are mostly driven to school.³¹
- › Active transportation is more common in the territories and British Columbia, and less common in Atlantic Canada and Québec.²⁸
- › Active transportation is more common in urban areas, especially in cities with 100,000-250,000 inhabitants.²⁸

CAR TRIPS ON THE RISE

While rates of walking are declining, the percentage of adolescents who take all of their trips by car has gone up over time.²⁹ This trend leads to more car traffic in school surroundings – and a sizable proportion of this traffic comes from parents whose children live within a reasonable walking distance but are nevertheless driven to and from school. For example, in the Greater Toronto Area, more than 30% of 8- to 14-year-olds who live within two kilometres of school are driven.³²

Parents may feel that they are keeping their children safe by driving them to school. Ironically, they are contributing to increased traffic volumes around schools (and thus the risk of road accidents) for children who use active transportation, creating a vicious circle.³³ In this context, it is an uphill battle to promote active transportation to individuals who are in the habit of taking most trips by car.

Similarly, an international study found that today's children are less likely to be allowed to walk or bike to neighbourhood destinations (e.g., schools, parks, a friend's place) without adult supervision.³⁴ This remains true in Canada even though 66% of adults from most provinces and territories agree or strongly agree that their neighbourhood is safe for children to walk in for travel to and from school.

WHY DON'T CHILDREN USE ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION?

Distance between home and school is the strongest reason why children and youth do not walk or bike to school.^{25, 31, 32, 35} Active transportation is also less likely when parents perceive that driving saves them time and/or is more convenient (e.g., dropping children to school on the way to work).³⁶

Road and neighbourhood safety (e.g., “stranger danger”) concerns are other important barriers to active transportation.^{32-34, 37} In New York City, the implementation of a “Safe Routes to School” program has led to a 44% decrease in road injury among children and youth. An equivalent program (“Active and Safe Routes to School”) exists in Canada.³⁸ The organization of “walking school buses” – groups of children who walk to school along a set route with adult supervision – can be a successful strategy to reduce safety concerns and increase physical activity.³⁹

STEPS WE CAN TAKE

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASING ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

PARENTS SHOULD:

- › Encourage and support their children to actively travel to and from school as well as to other destinations (friends' houses, parks, etc.).
- › Share responsibility with other parents for supervision of younger kids as they travel to and from school and activities (e.g., take turns leading a walking school bus).
- › Park the car a short distance from school and/or other destinations and walk from there when it is not possible for their kids to walk the whole way.

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS SHOULD:

- › Ensure that bike racks are provided in highly visible areas on school property.
- › Consider children's travel needs when deciding where to build new schools.
- › Facilitate the implementation of school travel plans, walking school buses, road safety education and other measures to ensure active and safe routes to school.

POLICY-MAKERS SHOULD:

- › Develop joint planning mechanisms and protocols to ensure that the built environment supports walking and biking as an easy choice for children and youth.
- › Encourage employers to offer flexible hours that would allow parents to support active travel opportunities for their kids.
- › Enforce traffic-calming measures in communities around schools and parks (zebra crossings, speed bumps, sidewalks, flashing lights, etc.).

BEHAVIOURS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO OVERALL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS

(PHYSICAL ACTIVITY & SEDENTARY BEHAVIOUR)

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY & SEDENTARY BEHAVIOUR

Organized Sport & Physical Activity Participation

- C** • 75% of 5- to 19-year-olds in Canada participated in organized physical activities and sport in the past year.
2009-11 CANPLAY, CFLRI
- 51% of students in Grades 6 to 10 in Canada reported participation in at least one organized sport (sport club or team) at the time of the survey.
2009-10 HBSC

Physical Education & Physical Activity Participation at School & in Childcare Settings

- C** • 52% of parents say their children (5- to 17-year-olds) participate in sport and/or physical activity programs at school.
2010 PAM, CFLRI
- 52% of grades 6 to 12 students across most Canadian provinces report participation in intramurals or school team sports.
2010-11 YSS

Active Transportation

- D** • According to parents, 24% of 5- to 17-year-olds in Canada use only active modes of transportation to and from school each day. 62% use only inactive modes of transportation and 14% use both active and inactive modes of transportation to and from school.
2010 PAM, CFLRI
- Between 2000 and 2010, the percentage of Canadian children and youth using only inactive modes of transportation to and from school has increased from 51% to 62%.
2010 PAM, CFLRI
- 58% of Canadian parents walked to school when they were children, compared to 28% of their children today.²⁷

Active Play & Leisure

- INC** • Parents report that their 3- to 4-year-olds and 5- to 11-year-olds get 5.3 and 4.1 hours per week, respectively, of physical activity outside of school while participating in unorganized activities, whether alone or with a friend.
2009-11 CHMS

Sedentary Behaviour

- F** • 18% of 3- to 4-year-olds in Canada meet the Canadian Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for the Early Years, which recommend daily screen time be limited to less than 1 hour.
2009-11 CHMS
- 69% of 5- to 11-year-olds in Canada, and 31% of 12- to 17-year-olds, meet the Canadian Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for Children and Youth, which recommend daily screen time of no more than 2 hours.
2009-11 CHMS
- 19% of 10- to 16-year-olds in Canada meet the Canadian Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for Children and Youth.
2009-10 HBSC

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS

D

- 84% of 3- to 4-year-olds in Canada meet the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for the Early Years, which recommend at least 180 minutes of daily physical activity at any intensity.
2009-11 CHMS
- 7% of 5- to 11-year-olds in Canada, and 4% of 12- to 17-year-olds, meet the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for Children and Youth, which recommend at least 60 minutes of daily MVPA.
2009-11 CHMS
- 40% of 5- to 17-year-olds in Canada accumulate at least 60 minutes of MVPA at least 3 days per week.
2009-11 CHMS

STRATEGIES & INVESTMENTS

POLICY

Federal Government Strategies & Investments

- C-** • There is evidence of movement in healthy active living initiatives and related funding on the part of the federal government. A lack of progress through the key stages of public policy making is one of the factors keeping this indicator from receiving a higher grade. Another factor that contributes to the grade is the current lack of a national physical activity plan supported by the federal government.

Provincial/Territorial Government Strategies & Investments

- C** • There is evidence of leadership and commitment from provincial/territorial governments to provide physical activity opportunities for all children and youth, particularly in the after-school period. While the majority of provinces/territories have a physical activity plan, investment and progress through the key stages of public policy varies among them.

Non-Government Strategies & Investments

- B+** • There is evidence of leadership and commitment from non-government organizations and groups to develop strategies and allocate funds and resources to increase physical activity for children and youth. While there are several examples of collaboration between and among non-government stakeholders and provincial/territorial and federal governments, there is a need for greater coordination to ensure alignment between emerging strategies and investments, and sustained progress toward improving the grade on future Report Cards.

SETTINGS & SOURCES OF INFLUENCE

SCHOOL & CHILDCARE SETTINGS

School Policy & Programming

- C** • 55% of schools in Canada report having a fully implemented policy for daily physical education for all students.^{2011 OPASS, CFLRI}
- 83% of schools in Canada report having a fully implemented policy to provide daily recess to their students.^{2011 OPASS, CFLRI}
- 59% of schools in Canada report having a fully implemented policy to provide students with a number of physical activity options such as competitive and non-competitive activities.^{2011 OPASS, CFLRI}
- 10% of schools in Canada report having a fully implemented policy to provide active transportation opportunities for students, such as a walking school bus.^{2011 OPASS, CFLRI}

School Infrastructure & Equipment

- B+** • 95% of school administrators in Canada report that students have regular access to a gymnasium during school hours.^{2009-10 HBSC}
- School administrators report that students have access to indoor facilities (68%) and equipment (56%) outside of school hours.^{2009-10 HBSC}

FAMILY & PEERS

Family Physical Activity

- C** • 58% of mothers in Canada rank physical activity as first or second in importance relative to other leisure activities that their children can do.¹⁰⁹
- 14% of Canadian adults (18- to 79-year-olds) meet the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults and Older Adults, which recommend at least 150 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity (MVPA) per week in bouts of 10 minutes or more.^{2009-11 CHMS}

Peer Influence

- INC** • While more research is needed in this area to assign a grade, youth report that their peers and friends expose them to new activities and help them stay motivated to be physically active.¹¹⁸

COMMUNITY & THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Community Policy & Programming

- B** • 64% of residents in most municipalities in Canada are somewhat or very satisfied with the job their municipality is doing to encourage residents to become physically active.^{2012 Ipsos Reid}

Availability of Facilities, Programs, Parks & Playgrounds

- A-** • 93% of parents report local availability of public facilities and programs for physical activity.^{2010 PAM, CFLRI}

Neighbourhood Safety

- B** • 66% of adults from most provinces and territories in Canada agree or strongly agree that their neighbourhood is safe for children to walk to and from school.²⁷

Nature & the Outdoors

- INC** • 70% of 13- to 20-year-olds from most provinces and territories in Canada say they spend an hour or less per day outside. These outdoor activities often involve hanging around their neighbourhoods, spending time with friends or engaging in active transportation (e.g., walking and biking to get to and from places).
David Suzuki Foundation, 2012
- Nearly 50% of 13- to 20-year-olds from most provinces and territories in Canada say they do not have enough time to be involved in an outdoor program.
David Suzuki Foundation, 2012
- Although Canadians value outdoor time, they strongly agree that children do not spend enough time outdoors.¹³⁵

METHODOLOGY, DETAILED FINDINGS & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Our interdisciplinary research team identifies and assesses Report Card indicators to determine grade assignments based on available data, research and key issue areas from the past year. Consideration is also given to prevalence levels, international comparisons, trends over time, disparities (age, geography, etc.) and newly emerging initiatives.

The detailed, long form version of this Report Card includes background on our methodology and process; in-depth analyses; summaries of key research, charts and figures; and complete references.

Visit www.activehealthykids.ca to download:

- 2013 Report Card – Short Form
- 2013 Report Card – Long Form
- Presentations, articles and media materials that will help you further understand and share the 2013 Report Card findings with others.



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Aussi disponible en français :
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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.

Active Healthy Kids Canada relies upon its strategic partners, who play a critical role in the research, content development and communication of the Report Card:



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