

Highlights from the 2015 ParticipACTION Report Card

About the 2015 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

- ParticipACTION takes over leadership of the Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth from Active Healthy Kids Canada.
- For the first time, the ParticipACTION Report Card includes a Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play, and takes a stand on outdoor and risky active play.
- The Position Statement finds that access to active play in nature and outdoors – with its risks – is essential for healthy child development.
 - The Position Statement was developed and supported by HALO-CHEO, ParticipACTION and a group of 12 other organizations, and reviewed and edited by over 1,600 stakeholders from across Canada and around the world.

The 2015 ParticipACTION Report Card reveals kids move more and sit less when they play outside and have some freedom to roam unsupervised and take risks

- Ontario preschoolers spend twice as much time being active when play is outdoors.¹
- Students take 35 per cent more steps in physical education class when it is held outdoors.²
- Canadian kids aged nine to 17 who play outside after school get 20 more minutes of heart-pumping activity per day, and are three times more likely to meet the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines.³
- Grade 5 and 6 students who are often or always allowed to go out and explore unsupervised get 20 per cent more heart-pumping activity than those who are always supervised.⁴
- Adventure playgrounds and loose parts playgrounds, which support some exposure to risky elements, lead to an increase in physical activity and decrease in sedentary behaviours.^{5,6,7,8}
- Self-directed outdoor play also helps foster healthy social and cognitive development:
 - Children who engage in active outdoor play in natural environments demonstrate resilience, self-regulation and develop skills for dealing with stress later in life.^{9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26,27}

¹ Vanderloo LM, Tucker P, Johnson AM and Holmes JD. Physical activity among preschoolers during indoor and outdoor childcare play periods. *Appl Physiol Nutr Metab.* 2013;38:1173-75.

² Smith J, Nichols D, Biggerstaff K and DiMarco N. Assessment of physical activity levels of 3rd and 4th grade children using pedometers during physical education class. *J Res.* 2009;4:73-79.

³ Schaefer L, Plotnikoff RC, Majumdar SR, Mollard R, Woo M, Sadman R, Rinaldi RL, Boule N, Torrance B, Ball GD, Veugelers P, Wozny P, McCargar L, Downs S, Lewanczuk R, Gleddie D, McGavock J. Outdoor time is associated with physical activity, sedentary time, and cardiorespiratory fitness in youth. *J Pediatr.* 2014;165: 516-521.

⁴ Mitra R, Faulkner GEJ, Buliung RN, Stone MR. Do parental perceptions of the neighbourhood environment influence children's independent mobility? Evidence from Toronto, Canada. *Urban Stud.* 2014;51(16)3401-3419.

⁵ Engelen L, Bundy AC, Naughton G, Simpson JM, Bauman A, Ragen J, Baur L, Wyver S, Tranter P, Niehues A, Schiller W, Perry G, Jessup G, van der Ploeg HP. Increasing physical activity in young primary school children — it's child's play: A cluster randomised controlled trial. *Prev Med.* 2013;56:319-325.

⁶ Bundy AC, Lockett T, Tranter PJ, Naughton GA, Wyver SR, Ragen J, Spies G. The risk is that there is "no risk": a simple, innovative intervention to increase children's activity levels. *Int J Early Years Educ.* 2009;17:33-45.

⁷ Weinstein CS, Pinciotti P. Changing a schoolyard: Intentions, design decisions, and behavioral outcomes. *Environ Behav.* 1988;20: 345-371.

⁸ Hayward DG, Rothenberg M, Beasley RR. Children's play and urban playground environments: A comparison of traditional, contemporary, and adventure playground types. *Environ Behav.* 1974;6:131-168.

- Outdoor play that occurs in minimally structured, free and accessible environments facilitates socialization with peers, the community and the environment, reduces feelings of isolation, builds inter-personal skills and facilitates healthy development.^{28,29,30,31,32,33,34,35,36,37}

However ... fear of risky outdoor play leads to over supervising kids and keeping them safe indoors

- Parental safety concerns (e.g., worry about strangers, bullies and traffic) are the primary barrier to independent active free play.³⁸

But ... keeping kids safe by over protecting them could be affecting their long-term health and development

⁹ Hüttenmoser, M. Children and their living surroundings: Empirical investigation into the significance of living surroundings for the everyday life and development of children. *Child Environ.* 1995;12: 403-413.

¹⁰ Veitch et al. Where do children usually play? A qualitative study of parents' perceptions of influences on children's active free-play. *Health Place.* 2006;12:383-393.

¹¹ Brussoni et al. Risky play and children's safety: Balancing priorities for optimal child development. *Int J Environ Res Public Health.* 2012;9:3134-3138.

¹² Prezza et al. The influence of psychosocial and environmental factors on children's independent mobility and relationship to peer frequentation. *J Community Appl Soc Psychol.* 2001;11:435-450.

¹³ Becker et al. Physical activity, self-regulation, and early academic achievement in preschool children. *Early Educ Dev.* 2014;25:56-70.

¹⁴ Kahn P, Kellert S. *Children and Nature: Psychological, Socio-cultural, and Evolutionary Investigations.* Boston, MA: MIT Press, 2002.

¹⁵ Bingley A, Milligan, C. *Climbing trees and building dens: Mental health and well-being in young adults and the long-term experience of childhood play experience.* London, U.K.: Lancaster University, Institute for Health Research, 2004. URL: tinyurl.com/CCN-2013-R112E

¹⁶ Greffrath et al. Centre-based and expedition-based (wilderness) adventure experiential learning personal effectiveness: an explorative enquiry. *Leisure Studies.* 2011;30:345-364.

¹⁷ Korpela et al. Restorative experience, self-regulation, and children's special place preferences. *J Environ Psychol.* 2002;22:387-398.

¹⁸ Sandseter. Risky play and risk management in Norwegian preschools - A qualitative observational study. *Saf Sci Monit.* 2009;13:1-12.

¹⁹ Mikkelsen MR, Christensen P. Is children's independent mobility really independent? A study of children's mobility combining ethnography and GPS/mobile phone technologies. *Mobilities.* 2009;4:37-58.

²⁰ Lavrysen, A.; Bertrands, E.; Leyssen, L.; Smets, L.; Vanderspikken, A.; De Graef, P. Risky-play at school. Facilitating risk perception and competence in young children. *Eur Early Child Educ* 2015, in press.

²¹ Ungar M. *Too safe for their own good.* Toronto: McClelland & Stewart; 2007.

²² Gray P. The decline of play and the rise of psychopathology in children and adolescents. *Am J Play.* 2011;3:443-463.

²³ Twenge et al. Birth cohort increases in psychopathology among young Americans, 1938-2007: A cross-temporal meta-analysis of the MMPI. *Clin Psychol Rev.* 2010;30:145-154.

²⁴ Twenge JM. The age of anxiety? Birth cohort change in anxiety and neuroticism, 1952-1993. *J Pers Soc Psychol.* 2000;79:1007-1021.

²⁵ Kochanowski L, Carr V. Nature playscapes as contexts for fostering self-determination. *Child Youth Environ.* 2014;24(2):146-67.

²⁶ McArdle et al. Does a nurturing approach that uses an outdoor play environment build resilience in children from a challenging background? *J Adventure Ed Outdoor Learn.* 2013;13(3):238-254.

²⁷ Canning N. 'Where's the bear? Over there!' – creative thinking and imagination in den making. *Early Child Dev Care.* 2013;183:1042-1053.

²⁸ Brussoni et al. What is the relationship between risky outdoor play and health in children? A systematic review. *Int J Environ Res Public Health.* In press.

²⁹ Hillman et al. *One false move: A study of children's independent mobility.* London: PSI Publishing; 1990.

³⁰ Aasen et al. The outdoor environment as a site for children's participation, meaning-making and democratic learning: examples from Norwegian kindergartens. *Education.* 2009;37:5-13.

³¹ Dowdell et al. Nature and its influence on children's outdoor play. *Aust J Outdoor Ed.* 2011;15(2):12.

³² Prezza et al. The influence of psychosocial and environmental factors on children's independent mobility and relationship to peer frequentation. *J Community Appl Soc Psychol.* 2001;11:435-450.

³³ Malone K, Rudner J. Global perspectives on children's independent mobility: a socio-cultural comparison and theoretical discussion of children's lives in four countries in Asia and Africa. *Global Studies of Childhood.* 2011;1:243-259.

³⁴ Joshi et al. Children's journey to school: spatial skills, knowledge and perceptions of the environment. *Br J Dev Psychol.* 1999;19:125-139.

³⁵ Rissotto A, Tonucci F. Freedom of movement and environmental knowledge in elementary school children. *J Environ Psychol.* 2002;22:65-77.

³⁶ Bixler et al. Environmental socialization: quantitative tests of the childhood play hypothesis. *Environ Behav.* 2002;34:795-818.

³⁷ Pacilli et al. Children and the public realm: antecedents and consequences of independent mobility in a group of 11 – 13-year-old Italian children. *Child Geogr.* 2013;11:377-393.

³⁸ Lee H, Tamminen KA, Clark AM, Slater L, Spence JC, Holt NL. A meta-study of qualitative research examining determinants of children's independent active free play. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act.* 2015;12(1):5.

- Children and youth are less likely to engage in higher levels of physical activity if a parent or supervising adult is present.^{39,40,41}
- Three-to-five-year-old kids are less likely to be active on playgrounds that are designed to be “safer,” because many kids equate less challenging with boring.⁴²
- Hyper-parenting limits physical activity and can harm mental health (e.g. increased anxiety and depression).^{43,44,45,46}

It's time ... learn the truth about risky outdoor play

- Risky outdoor play is not about courting danger – e.g. skating on a half-frozen lake or letting a preschooler walk alone to the park.
- Risky outdoor play is about play that is thrilling and exciting where kids independently test their abilities and limits.^{47,48} It's what many adults today did as children – like exploring the woods, tumbling and rough housing, moving fast or playing at heights.
- Broken bones and head injuries unfortunately do happen, but major trauma is uncommon. Most injuries associated with outdoor play are minor.^{49,50,51,52,53,54,55,56}
- The odds of total stranger abduction are about 1 in 14 million based on RCMP reports. Being with friends outdoors may further reduce this number.⁵⁷

³⁹ Mitra R, Faulkner GEJ, Buliung RN, Stone MR. Do parental perceptions of the neighbourhood environment influence children's independent mobility? Evidence from Toronto, Canada. *Urban Stud.* 2014;51(16):3401-3419.

⁴⁰ Janssen I. Hyper-parenting is negatively associated with physical activity among 7-12-year olds. *Prev Med.* 2015;73:55-59. Note: a custom analysis by the author also informs the key finding.

⁴¹ Floyd MF, Bocarro JN, Smith WR, Baran PK, Moore RC, Cosco NG, Edwards MB, Suau LJ, Fang K. Park-based physical activity among children and adolescents. *Am J Prev Med.* 2011;41:258-265.

⁴² Copeland KA, Sherman SN, Kendeigh CA, Kalkwarf HJ, Saelens BE. Societal values and policies may curtail preschool children's physical activity in child care centers. *Pediatrics.* 2012;129(2):265-274.

⁴³ Janssen I. Hyper-parenting is negatively associated with physical activity among 7-12-year olds. *Prev Med.* 2015;73:55-59. Note: a custom analysis by the author also informs the key finding.

⁴⁴ Ginsburg KR. The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds. *Pediatrics.* 2007;119:182-191.

⁴⁵ Schiffrin et al. Helping or hovering? The effects of helicopter parenting on college students' well-being. *J Child Fam Stud.* 2014;23:548-557.

⁴⁶ LeMoyne T, Buchanan T. Does "hovering" matter? Helicopter parenting and its effect on well-being. *Sociological Spectrum.* 2011;31:399-418.

⁴⁷ Ball et al. Managing risk in play provision: Implementation guide. Play England: London, 2012. p. 120.

⁴⁸ Sandseter et al. Children's risky play from an evolutionary perspective: The anti-phobic effects of thrilling experiences. *Evol Psychol.* 2011;9:257-284.

⁴⁹ Fuselli P, Yanchar NL. Preventing playground injuries. *Paediatr. Child Health.* 2012;17:328.

⁵⁰ Canadian Institute for Health Information. National Trauma Registry Minimum Data Set, 1994-1995 to 2012-2013. URL: www.cihi.ca/CIHI-ext-portal/internet/en/document/types-of-care/specialized-services/trauma+and+injuries/ntr_metadata

⁵¹ Rubie-Davies CM, Townsend MAR. Fractures in New Zealand elementary school settings. *J Sch Health.* 2007;77:36-40.

⁵² Nauta J et al. Injury risk during different physical activity behaviours in children: A systematic review with bias assessment. *Sport Med.* 2015;45:327-336.

⁵³ Public Health Agency of Canada Child and youth injury in review, 2009 edition: Spotlight on consumer product safety. Public Health Agency of Canada: Ottawa, 2009.

⁵⁴ Belechri et al. Sports injuries among children in six European Union countries. *Eur J Epidemiol.* 2001;17:1005-1012.

⁵⁵ Sahai VS et al. Quantifying the iceberg effect for injury: using comprehensive community health data. *Can J Public Health.* 2005;96:328-332.

⁵⁶ Howard et al. School playground surfacing and arm fractures in children: a cluster randomized trial comparing sand to wood chip surfaces. *PLoS Med.* 2009;6(12):e1000195.

⁵⁷ Dalley ML, Ruscoe J. The abduction of children by strangers in Canada: Nature and scope. Royal Canadian Mounted Police. 2003. URL: www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/pubs/omc-ned/abd-rapt-eng.htm

Now ... get out of the way and let them play outside

- Although we see an alarmingly low percentage of Canadian youth and children meeting Canada's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines, it's the first time this year we see four of the 11 grades in the Report Card increase and none decrease. Although the needle is moving in the right direction, we still have a ways to go, so it's important to step back and let kids play outdoors.
- Value long-term health and fun as much as safety, by recognizing the difference between "real danger" and "risk" to increase children's opportunities for independent play outdoors in all settings - at home, at school, in child care, the community and nature.
- The [Position Statement](#) and [ParticipACTION Tips Sheet](#) include recommendations directed at parents, educators and caregivers, health professionals, injury prevention professionals, school and child care administrators, media, attorneys general, governments and society at large to help increase all children's opportunities for self-directed play outdoors.

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To download the 2015 ParticipACTION Report Card Highlight Report, including the Position Statement, or the 58-page Full Report, please visit www.participactionreportcard.com.

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