

KEY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY STATS AMONG CHILDREN AND YOUTH

LIVING IN CANADA

This document shares key stats that reflect the current state of physical activity levels among children and youth living in Canada.

Moderate- to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA):

“MVPA” is physical activity that’s intense enough to raise your heart rate and body temperature. With MVPA, you can talk but can’t sing. Examples include running, swimming, cycling and tennis.

- Youth between 15 and 17 years of age who reported non-heterosexual attraction were less likely to meet the MVPA benchmark (16.8%) compared to youth in the same age group who reported heterosexual attraction.¹
- The results of the [University of Waterloo’s 2022-2023 COMPASS](#) revealed that:
 - 66% of students in grades 7 to 12 from Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario and Québec with relatively lower household incomes met the MVPA recommendation.
 - Combined, 45% of students met both the MVPA and muscle- and bone-strengthening recommendations.
 - Only 38% of students with relatively lower household incomes met both recommendations.
- According to the [CHMS](#) (Cycles 1 to 6; 2007-2019):
 - There was an 11% gap in meeting the MVPA recommendation between 5- to 11-year-old children living in the lowest income households (46%) and those living in the highest income households (57%).
 - Among racial and ethnic groups, fewer South Asian boys (43%) and Chinese girls (23%) between 5 and 11 years of age met the MVPA recommendation than White boys (62%) and girls (40%) in the same age group.
 - In 12- to 17-year-old youth, more South Asian boys (57%) than White boys (40%) met the MVPA recommendation.
 - Newcomer girls between 5 and 17 years were less likely to meet the MVPA recommendation (18%) than non-newcomer girls (28%).

Reference:

1. Wang C, Butler G, Szczepanowski MRJ, Betancourt MT, Roberts KT. Physical activity, organized sport participation and active transportation to school among Canadian youth by gender identity and sexual attraction. *Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada*. 2024 Feb;44(2):47-55.

Active play:

“Active play” involves voluntarily doing fun and/or rewarding physical activities.

- According to the [Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute's \(CFLRI's\) 2022 Parent Survey of the Physical Activity and Sport Participation among 5- to 17-year-olds](#), 28% of parents from the lowest income households said that their children achieved the active play benchmark, compared to 18% of parents from the highest income households.
- The [2019 Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth](#) revealed that 16% of 5- to 11-year-olds and 7% of 12- to 17-year-olds with functional limitations reported meeting the active play benchmark. Among those with no limitations, 15% of 5- to 11-year-olds and 4.7% of 12- to 17-year-olds met the active play standard.
- One study found that children who spoke a non-official language at home spent less time outdoors per day (1.4 hours) than those who spoke English or French at home (1.7 hours).¹
- Another study found that girls who lived in suburban or rural areas were twice as likely to spend over two hours outside on weekdays, but these links were not found in boys. Boys and girls in the lower socioeconomic status areas were less likely to spend more than two hours outside on weekends. Girls living in rural areas were twice as likely to spend over two hours outside on weekend days than those living in urban areas. No differences were seen in boys.²

References:

1. Nayakarathna R, Patel NB, Currie C, Faulkner G, Riazi NA, Tremblay MS, et al. Correlates of Outdoor Time in Schoolchildren from Families Speaking Nonofficial Languages at Home: A Multisite Canadian Study. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health* 2022 Dec 1;19(12):828–36.
2. Bremer E, Martin Ginis KA, Bassett-Gunter RL, Arbour-Nicitopoulos KP. Factors associated with participation in physical activity among Canadian school-aged children with autism spectrum disorder: An application of the International Classification of functioning, disability and health. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2020 Aug 14;17(16):5925.

Active transportation:

Active transportation is any form of human-powered travel, including walking, jogging, wheeling, cycling, rollerblading, roller-skating, skateboarding and scootering. Since taking public transit usually includes walking or wheeling between stations or stops, it can also count.

- Between 2018 and 2021, there was a greater drop in active transportation among girls than among boys. For girls, average active transportation time in 2018 was 24 minutes per day, while in 2021 it was 18 minutes per day.
 - On average, this is a decrease of 42 minutes per week.
 - Among boys, average active transportation time in 2018 was 26 minutes per day, while in 2021, it was 23 minutes per day – a decrease of 21 minutes per week on average.¹
- Youth between the ages of 15 and 17 years of age who reported non-heterosexual attraction used more active transportation to get to school (169 minutes per week) compared to heterosexual youth in the same age group (126 minutes per week).²

- Nationally representative data collected in the [Active Transport and Independent Mobility \(ATIM\) study](#) indicated that children with disabilities or chronic illnesses had lower independent mobility (freedom to move around in public spaces without adult supervision) than those who did not.³
- Lower household income was linked with higher independent mobility, but the difference was only significant when comparing children in families earning \$40,000 to \$99,999 per year vs. \$100,000 or more per year.⁴
- Previous research shows that children with higher independent mobility are more likely to use active transportation.⁴

References:

1. Colley RC, Saunders TJ. Ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the physical activity of Canadian children and youth. *Health Reports* 2023;34(10):3-12.
2. Wang C, Butler G, Szczepanowski MRJ, Betancourt MT, Roberts KT. Physical activity, organized sport participation and active transportation to school among Canadian youth by gender identity and sexual attraction. *Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada*. 2024 Feb;44(2):47-55.
3. Larouche R, Bélanger M, Brussoni M, Faulkner G, Gunnell K, Tremblay MS. Canadian children's independent mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic: A national survey. *Health & Place*. 2023 May;81:103019.
4. Schoeppe S, Duncan MJ, Badland H, Oliver M, Curtis C. Associations of children's independent mobility and active travel with physical activity, sedentary behaviour and weight status: a systematic review. *Journal of Science in Medicine & Sport*. 2013 Jul;16(4):312–9.

Organized sport:

Organized sport is structured and goal-oriented physical activity that can be competitive and/or contest-based. Examples include school basketball teams, recreational softball leagues and competitive swim teams.

- According to the [CFLRI's 2022 Parent Survey of the Physical Activity and Sport Participation among 5- to 17-year-olds](#):
 - More parents reported that their sons participated in sports (71%) than their daughters (64%).
 - 73% of parents from the highest income households stated that their child had participated in sports within the past year, compared to 60% of parents from lower-income households.
- The [University of Waterloo's 2022-2023 COMPASS](#) results revealed that:
 - 59% of students in grades 7 to 12 participated in organized sports, including school intramural sports, school varsity sports or community sports.
 - 61% of students from average or higher income households participated in organized sports compared to 46% of students from lower income households.
- According to the [2019 Canadian Health Survey on Children and Youth \(CHSCY\)](#), 55% of children and youth from the lowest income households, compared to 86% from the highest income households, participated in a sport or physical activity with a coach or instructor.
- Results of the [Canadian Community Health Survey \(CCHS\)](#) revealed that:

- 49% of 15- to 17-year-old transgender youth participated in organized sport in the past year, compared to 67% of cisgender youth in the same age group.
- On average, transgender youth spent significantly less time participating in organized sport (96 minutes per week) than cisgender youth (214 minutes per week).
- Youth who reported non-heterosexual attraction were less likely to participate in organized sport in the past year (49%) and spent less time participating in organized sport (130 minutes per week) than youth who reported heterosexual attraction (63% and 216 minutes per week).¹

Reference:

1. Wang C, Butler G, Szczepanowski MRJ, Betancourt MT, Roberts KT. Physical activity, organized sport participation and active transportation to school among Canadian youth by gender identity and sexual attraction. Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada. 2024 Feb;44(2):47-55.

Physical education:

Physical education is a school subject where students engage in physical exercise and/or participate in physical games or sports.

- According to the [2019 CHSCY](#), compared to all youth, a lower percentage of girls with functional limitations (62%) and a higher percentage of boys with parents who had a post-secondary education (74%) were taking a physical education class.

Sedentary behaviours:

Sedentary behaviours are any waking behaviours that use 1.5 or fewer metabolic equivalents or METs (the amount of oxygen consumed while at rest) while in a sitting, reclining or lying posture. Examples include using a computer while seated in an office chair, watching TV while reclining on a couch and scrolling on a smartphone while lying in bed.

- According to the Public Health Agency of Canada's 2023 Physical Activity, Sedentary Behaviour and Sleep (PASS) Indicators, 49% of children and youth from low-income households, compared to 56% of those from high-income households, met the sedentary behaviour benchmark of no more than two hours per day of recreational screen time.
- The results of the [University of Waterloo's 2022-2023 COMPASS](#) showed that 3% of students in grades 7 to 12 met the screen time recommendations. This includes 3% of White students, 1% of Latin American students, 3% of Asian students, 5% of Black students and 3% of other/multi-ethnic students.

Sleep:

The [Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth](#) recommend that 5- to 13-year-olds sleep uninterrupted for nine to 11 hours per night on average and 14- to 17-year-olds sleep uninterrupted for eight to 10 hours a night on average.

- According to the [University of Waterloo's 2022-2023 COMPASS results](#), 59% of White grade 7 to 12 students met the sleep time recommendation of eight to 10 hours per night, compared to 48% of Latin American, 49% of Asian, 44% of Black and 51% of other/multi-ethnic students.
- Findings from the [2021 Canadian Community Health Survey \(CCHS\)](#) showed that 45% of boys and 36% of girls met the sleep time recommendation.

24-hour movement behaviours:

24-hour movement behaviours include physical activity, sedentary behaviours and sleep. The [Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth](#) show how to balance these three types of behaviour every day to help children and youth live healthy lives.

- According to the [University of Waterloo's 2022-2023 COMPASS results](#), 1% of students in grades 7 to 12 met all the *Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines*, with or without the strength-training recommendation. This included 2% of Black and less than 1% of Latin American students, compared to 1% of all other ethnicities.

Household:

This refers to parents/guardians facilitating physical activity and sport opportunities for their children, such as by transporting them to places where they can get active or watching their children participate in physical activity and sport.

- The [CFLRI's 2022 Parent Survey of the Physical Activity and Sport Participation among 5- to 17-year-olds](#) revealed that a greater percentage of parents living in higher income households reported that they *often* or *very often* transport their children places so that they can participate in physical activity and sport (55% in the highest income households vs. 43% in the lowest income households), or *often* or *very often* watch their child participate in physical activity and sport (53% in the highest income households vs. 45% in the lowest income households).