Chapter 7: Active Play

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2024 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

The report card is the most comprehensive assessment of child and youth physical activity in Canada. The assessment is divided into three categories:

- Strategies and investment (government)
- Settings and sources of influence (family and peers, school, community and environment)
- Individual characteristics (physical literacy, physical fitness) and daily behaviours (overall physical activity, active play and leisure activities, active transportation, organized sport participation, physical education, sedentary behaviours, sleep, 24-hour movement behaviours)

The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Children and Youth are the first evidence-based guidelines to integrate all movement behaviours occurring over a full day: physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep.

These guidelines are considered the gold standard for active living by the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology.



Physical activity guidelines for children

0 to 4 years

Infants (less than one year old) should be physically active several times a day in a variety of ways, particularly through interactive floor-based play. More is better. For those not yet mobile, at least 30 minutes of tummy time spread throughout the day is recommended.

Toddlers (one to two years old) and preschoolers (three to four years) should spend at least 180 minutes in a variety of physical activities throughout the day, including energetic play. More is better. Preschoolers should work toward at least 60 minutes of energetic play each day.

5 to 17 years

For optimal health, at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity is recommended. This should include Vigorous-intensity activities, including a variety of aerobic activities, at least three days per week

- Activities that strengthen muscle and bone, at least three days per week
- Several hours of a variety of structured and unstructured light physical activities, for example, walking to school

Sedentary behaviour guidelines for children

0 to 4 years

For healthy growth and development, children younger than four years should not be restrained for more than one hour at a time, for example in a stroller or high chair.

Sedentary screen time is not recommended for children under two. Children two to four years old should be limited to no more than one hour of sedentary screen time. Less is better.

5 to 17 years

No more than two hours of recreational screen time per day is recommended. Sitting for extended periods should be limited when possible. Consider replacing sedentary behaviour with outdoor time and light physical activity for greater health benefits.

Sleep behaviour guidelines for children

0 to 4 years

For infants less than one year old, 14 to 17 hours (for those aged zero to three months) or 12 to 16 hours (for those aged four to 11 months) of good-quality sleep, including naps is recommended.

For toddlers (one to two years old), 11 to 14 hours of good-quality sleep, including naps, with consistent bedtimes and wake-up times is recommended.

For preschoolers (three to four years old), 10 to 13 hours of good-quality sleep with consistent bedtimes and wake-up times is recommended. This may include naps.

5 to 17 years

For children five to 13 years, nine to 11 hours of uninterrupted sleep per night is recommended.

For those aged 14 to 17 years, eight to 10 hours of sleep per night is recommended. To preserve sufficient sleep, all children and youth will benefit from consistent bed and wake up times.