

# Youth Physical Activity:

## The Role of Communities



Being physically active is one of the most important steps to being healthy. Communities can help make physical activity an easy and fun option for youth. Community members can work together to help youth be more active.

### How Does Physical Activity Help?

- Builds strong bones and muscles.<sup>1</sup>
- Decreases the likelihood of obesity and risk factors for diseases like type 2 diabetes and heart disease.<sup>1</sup>
- May reduce anxiety and depression and promote positive mental health.<sup>1</sup>

### How Much Physical Activity Do Youth Need?

- Children and adolescents should do 60 minutes (1 hour) or more of physical activity daily.<sup>2</sup>
  - *Aerobic Activities:* Most of the 60 or more minutes per day should be either moderate- or vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity. Vigorous-intensity physical activity should be included at least 3 days per week.
    - Examples of aerobic activities include bike riding, brisk walking, running, dancing, and playing active games like tag, soccer, and basketball.
  - *Muscle-strengthening Activities:* Include muscle-strengthening physical activity on at least 3 days of the week as part of the 60 or more minutes.
    - Examples of muscle-strengthening activities for younger children include gymnastics, playing on a jungle gym, and climbing a tree.
    - Examples of muscle-strengthening activities for adolescents include push-ups, pull-ups, and weightlifting exercises.
  - *Bone-strengthening Activities:* Include bone-strengthening physical activity on at least 3 days of the week as part of the 60 or more minutes.
    - Examples of bone-strengthening activities include hopping, skipping, jumping, running, and sports like gymnastics, basketball, and tennis.
- Some activities may address more than one category at a time. For example, gymnastics is both muscle-strengthening and bone-strengthening. Running is aerobic and bone-strengthening.
- Activities should be age-appropriate, be enjoyable, and offer variety.<sup>2</sup>

### How Physically Active Are Youth?

- Among 9<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> grade students, only 11% of girls and 24% of boys said they were physically active at least 60 minutes per day.<sup>3</sup>
- Among 9–13 year olds, only 39% said they participated in organized physical activity.<sup>4</sup>
- Among 9<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> grade students, 56% said they played on at least one sports team run by their school or community group.<sup>5</sup>
- In 1969, 41% of students walked or biked to school. By 2001, only 13% of students walked or biked to school.<sup>6</sup>





## How Can Communities Encourage Physical Activity?

Communities can make it easier for people to be physically active. Here are some ways communities can promote physical activity for youth and their families:



### Conduct Community-wide Campaigns

- Promote physical activity messages to youth and families through television, radio, newspapers, movie theaters, and billboards.<sup>7</sup>



### Make Changes That Make It Easier to be Physically Active

- Provide funding to build and link sidewalks, crosswalks, and bicycle lanes.
- Put in curb cuts so that bikes, strollers, and wheelchairs can easily cross streets.
- Install traffic signals to slow cars down and improve safety.
- Provide funding for and promote the use of walking trails or paths in local neighborhood parks.



### Help People Find Places Where They Can Be Physically Active

- Find and promote safe ways to walk and bike to school.
- Let community members and organizations use school gymnasiums, playing fields, and playgrounds when school is not in session.<sup>8</sup>
- Encourage community organizations to offer physical activity programs for youth. Community organizations can work with schools to offer after-school physical activity programs and events.



### Work With Schools to Increase Youth Physical Activity

- Colleges, universities, hospitals, health departments, businesses, and community groups can work with schools to support physical activity programs. Such support can include giving money or equipment or encouraging staff to volunteer time to lead a physical activity programs or events.
- Community organizations can offer after-school physical activity programs at schools, or they can provide transportation to offsite programs.
- Community organizations can support and participate in *Safe Routes to School* programs, which encourage more children to safely walk and bike to school.



### Partner With Other Community Groups

- Encourage local media to tell stories about physical activity.
- Organize a bike rodeo to promote safe bicycling practices.
- Turn a local field or vacant lot into a park, ball court, or playground area.
- Partner with local organizations to host special physical activity events, such as fun runs or field days.

## Where Can I Find Additional Information About Youth Physical Activity?

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2008. Available at: <http://www.health.gov/paguidelines>.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Healthy Youth! Physical Activity. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/physicalactivity/>.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Making Physical Activity a Part of a Child's Life. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/getactive/children.html>.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Guide to Community Preventive Services*. Available at: <http://www.thecommunityguide.org/pa/index.html>.
- National Center for Safe Routes to School. Available at: <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/>.
- Partnership for Prevention. *Places for Physical Activity: Facilitating Development of a Community Trail and Promoting Its Use to Increase Physical Activity Among Youth and Adults—An Action Guide*. *The Community Health Promotion Handbook: Action Guides to Improve Community Health*. Washington, DC: Partnership for Prevention; 2008. Available at: <http://www.prevent.org/content/view/157/175/>.
- Partnership for Prevention. *Social Support for Physical Activity: Establishing a Community-Based Walking Group Program to Increase Physical Activity Among Youth and Adults—An Action Guide*. *The Community Health Promotion Handbook: Action Guides to Improve Community Health*. Washington, DC: Partnership for Prevention; 2008. Available at: <http://www.prevent.org/content/view/158/177/>.
- Leadership for Healthy Communities. Supporting Healthy Communities Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. Washington, DC: Leadership for Healthy Communities; 2009. Available at: [http://www.leadershipforhealthycommunities.org/images/stories/lhc\\_policybrief\\_econ\\_4.6.09\\_final.pdf](http://www.leadershipforhealthycommunities.org/images/stories/lhc_policybrief_econ_4.6.09_final.pdf).





# **Be Active and Play, 60 minutes, every day!**

## **References**

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Physical activity guidelines advisory committee report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2008.
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3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2007. Unpublished data.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Media Campaign Longitudinal Survey, 2002. *MMWR* 2003;52(33):785-8.
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2007. *MMWR*. 2008;57(No. SS-4):1-131.
6. McDonald MC. Active transport to school: trends among U.S. schoolchildren, 1969-2001. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 2007;32(6):509-16.
7. Guide to Community Preventive Services. Campaigns and informational approaches to increase physical activity: community-wide campaigns. Available at: [www.thecommunityguide.org/pa/campaigns/community.html](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/pa/campaigns/community.html).
8. Guide to Community Preventive Services. Environmental and policy approaches to increase physical activity: creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity combined with informational outreach activities. Available at: [www.thecommunityguide.org/pa/environmental-policy/improvingaccess.html](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/pa/environmental-policy/improvingaccess.html).

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion  
Division of Adolescent and School Health  
[www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth](http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth)**

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