

The Healthy Kids Community Challenge



Our community is one of 45 across Ontario taking part in the Healthy Kids Community Challenge. This program unites communities with a common goal: improving children's health through physical activity and healthy eating. These two factors are key to helping children maintain a healthy weight.

Childhood overweight and obesity

Children and youth who are overweight or obese are more likely to become obese adults¹. This puts them at risk of many serious health problems, including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, breast and colon cancer, type 2 diabetes, gall bladder disease and osteoarthritis². Aboriginal children experience higher levels of overweight and obesity compared to other Canadian children.

Healthy weights can also boost kids' self-esteem and mental health.

- For Aboriginal children and youth aged 2-17 living off-reserve, 59% are at a healthy weight, while 41% are overweight or obese³.
- Among First Nations kids aged 2-11 living on-reserve, 37.5% are at a normal weight or underweight, while

62.5% are overweight or obese⁴. For those aged 12-17 living on-reserve, 57% are of normal weight or underweight, while 43% were overweight or obese⁵.

Run. Jump. Play. Every Day.

Every nine months or so, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care will announce a new theme for the Healthy Kids Community Challenge. The first theme is **Run. Jump. Play. Every Day**. This theme encourages a mix of different physical activities, including:

- Active play
- Sports
- Active transportation – getting kids from point A to point B in an active way, such as walking, running, biking, and skateboarding
- Structured activities in school and after – including team sports, martial arts, and dance.

Any form of fun or regular movement is physical activity.

Physical activity has many benefits for children. For example, in Aboriginal children it has been shown to increase their self-esteem and reduce smoking⁶. Our challenge is to find ways to get kids moving in our community.

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Did you know

- When youth know a First Nations language and feel spiritually balanced 'most of the time' or 'all of the time,' they are more likely to engage in traditional First Nations physical activities. Examples include berry picking, hunting/trapping, fishing, and canoeing/kayaking⁷.
- In one survey of First Nations children, being physically active was positively associated with eating berries and other plant foods; sharing traditional foods; participating in sports teams or lessons; participating in traditional singing, drumming and dancing⁸.
- First Nations youth who report living in balance physically, and having more relatives help them understand their culture, were more likely to do more than 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each day⁹.
- Less than one-quarter of First Nations children say they:
 - Participate in competitive or team sports such as hockey, basketball, baseball, lacrosse, and tennis (23.2%)
 - Go fishing (21.3%)
 - Garden or do yard work (17.8%)¹⁰.
- More First Nations boys than girls participate in competitive or team sports such as hockey, basketball, baseball, lacrosse, and tennis; go fishing, hunting or trapping; or play golf. In contrast, more girls than boys participate in swimming, berry picking or other food gathering, dancing, or aerobics and fitness classes¹¹.
- Older (aged 9-11) First Nations children – boys and girls – tend to participate more than younger (aged 6-8) children in competitive or team sports, skiing or snowboarding, golf, using weights or exercise equipment, canoeing or kayaking, and snowshoeing¹².

Why 'Run. Jump. Play. Every Day.'

- Improves cardiovascular fitness (heart and blood flow)
- Builds strong muscle and bone density
- Improves coordination and movement control
- Helps kids maintain a healthy body weight
- Helps prevent chronic disease in later life
- Improves self-esteem and mental health
- Reduces depression, anxiety and emotional distress
- Boosts learning, attention span and academic success
- Provides opportunities for self-expression, learning new skills, building self-confidence, and having fun
- Builds social skills such as cooperation, respect for others, problem solving, fair play and teamwork.

Quick facts about kids' health and fitness

To meet the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines, kids need to get 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity every day¹³. However:

- Just 14% of Canadian kids aged 5-11 meet this target¹⁴.
- 40% of Canadian kids aged 5-17 get 60 minutes of physical activity at least 3 days a week¹⁵.

Sedentary behaviours

Kids who are sedentary spend a lot of time sitting instead of moving. Research suggests that high levels of sedentary behaviour increase health risks in children, no matter how active they are at other times¹⁶.

- Canadian kids aged 3-4 spend 7.5 hours a day being sedentary. Those aged 5-11 spend 7.6 hours¹⁷.
- Aboriginal kids living off-reserve spend an average of four hours each day watching television, videos or DVDs, on a computer, or playing video games. Those who spent less than four hours in these activities were more likely to play sports at least once a week¹⁸.
- The First Nations Regional Health Survey 2008/10 found that on an average day, 37% of First Nations children spend more than 1.5 hours watching television. About 20% spend more than 1.5 hours playing video games per day¹⁹.

Physical activity

Children who participate in organized physical activities or sports take on average almost 1,700 more steps per day than children who do not participate in these types of activities²⁰. Yet we know that as kids get older, many will stop participating. And, at all ages, more boys than girls participate²¹.

- More than twice as many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children between ages 6 to 14 have a health condition that limits their physical activity as do Canadian children overall²².
- Recent surveys show that among on-reserve First Nations people, 61.9% of those aged age 6-11 are considered active and 20.2% are considered moderately active²³.

Outdoor play

Children who spend more time outdoors tend to have higher levels of physical activity²⁴.

- Over the last decade there has been a 14% drop in the number of Canadian kids who play outside after school.²⁵
- Most young Métis (96%) and First Nations (94%) children living off-reserve play outside every day in warm weather. About 40% play outside every day in cold weather, while half play outside less than once a day in cold weather²⁶.
- Less than half of Canadian kids aged 6-11 get 3 hours or less of unstructured, physically active play a week, including weekends²⁷.



Nurturing change

As we move forward to help kids get active, we need to keep in mind the unique values and experiences of our community. For example:

- Aboriginal teachings approach health and wellness in a holistic way. This means the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual elements must all be in balance in a person. This idea is often represented by the four directions of the medicine wheel²⁸.
- Aboriginal people's health and well-being is influenced by very real historical factors. These include social, economic and political inequities²⁹.

Many Aboriginal peoples are working to overcome health challenges by fostering resilience among families and communities. This includes:

- Addressing the immediate disadvantages faced by community members.
- Identifying and acting on the root causes of these inequities³⁰.

The Healthy Kids Community Challenge offers a great way to strengthen the resilience of some of the youngest people in our community. It can plant seeds of change that will help our entire community flourish.

More facts about Aboriginal populations in Ontario

- The Aboriginal population in Ontario is the largest of any province in Canada, with over 300,000 self-identifying as Aboriginal and making up 2.4% of Ontario's population³¹.
 - This includes three distinct groups: First Nations (200,000), Métis (86,000), Inuit (3,500), as well as other groups (11,000)³².
- The Aboriginal population in Ontario is young. Nearly 25% of the population is under age 15, compared to 17% for the non-Aboriginal population³³.
- In Ontario, 1 in 6 Aboriginal people live on-reserve³⁴.



Questions? Need help?

Visit ontario.ca/HealthyKids or contact your Healthy Kids Community Challenge local project manager:

Local Project Manager:



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