COVID-19

TOOLKIT FOR RECREATION

How to help children get active after the pandemic

CHILDREN'S PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Active lifestyles are an essential part of children's health and development.

Research has shown that physical activity leads to **physical, mental, social, and cognitive health benefits**, including, but are not limited to:

- reduced risk of cardiovascular disease [2]
- lower chance of metabolic illnesses (ex. diabetes) [3]
- stronger bones and muscles [4]
- enhanced sleep quality [5]
- less stress, depressive & anxiety symptoms [6]
- improved attention, memory & critical thinking [7]
- stronger communication & bonding skills [8]

DID YOU KNOW

The national movement guidelines [1] suggest children and youth should engage in:

- 60-minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily
- Replace sedentary activities with low intensity activities like going for a walk
- Limit screen time to no more than 2 hours per day
- 9-11 hours of sleep per night

ARE CHILDREN MOVING IN CANADA?

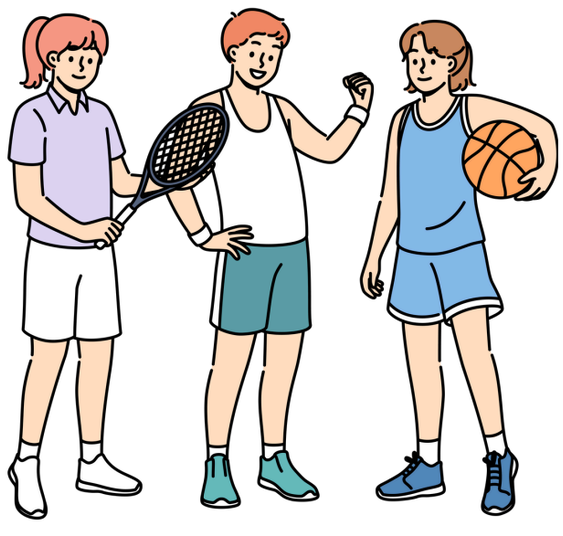
Nationally,

39% of children averaged 60-minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity before the pandemic [9]

compared to

28% of children met the national movement guidelines during the pandemic [10]

Locally,



50%

of parents reported their children were **less active** during the pandemic [11]

53%

of parents reported their children **replaced physical activity with screen time** [11]

During interviews [12], parents highlighted various COVID-related factors that influenced their child's physical activity:

Modifications to everyday life

COVID-19 protocols changed the places, activities and people children could play with on a daily basis

Access to opportunities

Some factors supported (having trails and parks near home) or limited (expenses) participation in physical activity opportunities

Safety in Public Spaces

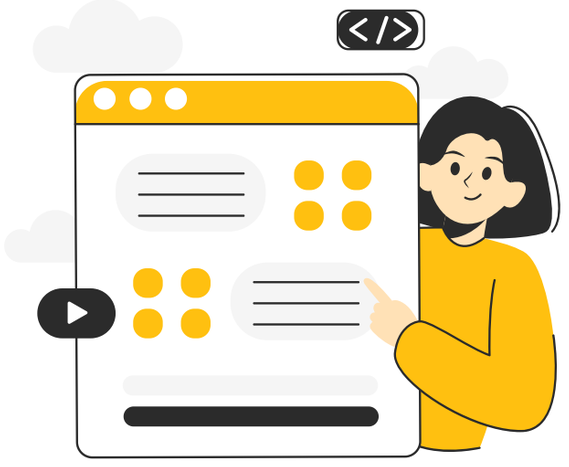
Parents either felt that they were either (1) Comfortable returning to activities since they are important for their children, or (2) Uncomfortable bringing their children to high-risk places like gyms

WHAT WILL YOU LEARN FROM THIS TOOLKIT?

This toolkit provides a series of insights on ***children's physical activity in Southwestern Ontario during the COVID-19 pandemic***.

Insights will be followed up by recommendations on **how to help engage children in organized and drop-in programs** and **encourage families to return to recreational facilities**.

The recommendations from this toolkit are the combination of research findings from Western University with insights and recommendations from local organizations.



HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE FAMILIES TO ENROL IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PROGRAMS?

1 Communication

Information is an important tool. For families to be able to use your facilities, they have to know they exist. Make sure to provide clear materials tailored to your audience so they know about the programs available at your organization.

Variations in promotions

To reach more families, provide a greater amount and variety of promotions about the programs offered. There is a lot of information that people are exposed to each day, so quantity matters.

Keep your audience in mind

Use different platforms and think about the popular platforms for your target audience. To increase equity, offer both digital and paper resources.

2 Accessibility

For families to become a member at your facility, they have feel like they will be able to get to the activities, whether geographically or financially. By improving the accessibility of your offerings, the greater chance families can participate.

Disperse activity options

Have multiple locations? Have programs in a variety of neighbourhoods so children have local activity options. You can also partner with schools to spread your programs across the community.

Affordability of programs

If you have the budget, consider offering free and low-cost programs reduce the financial barriers to programs. This can also allow children to try different activities and find what they enjoy!

Transportation

Getting to locations can be challenging for families. Have a bus? Create an after school pick-up programs from local schools. If you are looking to open another facility, consider public transportation stops and active transportation options when picking a location.

3 Socialization

To reduce exposure to the COVID-19 virus, families had to restrict the number of people they interacted with and created a family ‘bubble’. Children have missed getting to go and play with their friends and extended family. Children want more chances to get out and socialize.

Consider the social during activities

Getting children to return to recreational programs and getting active is important, but don’t forget the importance of social time. Give children the opportunity to chat, collaborate and work together.

Family activities

Did you know: parental role modelling and support can improve the activity levels of children? Parents should not only supervise activities. Offer family activities like skates and swims to get them involved!

4 Diversity of Options

Everyone is different and have individual needs when it comes to physical activity. Needs can differ based on limitations or personal preferences. To accommodate the range of people in the community, provide an assortment of flexible and adaptable recreational programs.

Adaptable programs

Children come with different needs. Adapt activities to meet the needs of children and their families. Consider limitations, competitive levels and fundamental skill building.

Unstructured play

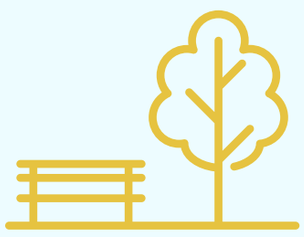
Many programs offered tend to be organized, but many families enjoy drop-in activities or open gym times. Encourage unstructured play that is child-driven and allows them to use their creativity!

Unconvential activities

Organized activities tend to focus on sports like soccer, basketball and hockey. For children not as interested in sports, like about non-traditional activities like dodgeball and playground games.

5 Outdoor Spaces

Many families have discomfort with indoor spaces during the pandemic, particularly gyms and recreational spaces that are classified as high-risk areas. Outdoor spaces, like parks, trains and green spaces, are viewed as important places for children to engage in physical activity.

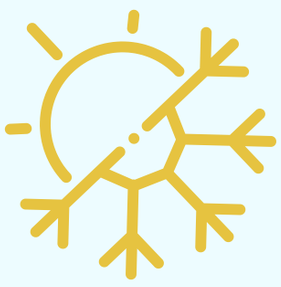


Take advantage of the outdoor areas in your community

COVID-19 reconnected families with the outdoors, with some parents viewing outdoor spaces as safe places for play. Use the outdoor spaces at your facility for activities or offer programs in local parks.

Encourage families to use outdoor resources

Tell members about how they can walk or bike to your facility and encourage them to use your outdoor options, such as basketball hoops, tennis courts or playground equipment.



Weather

Canada has extreme shifts in weather between seasons. While winter is seen as a time when it is difficult to get children outside, there are lots of create ways to make playing outside during the winter fun! Offer actvities like snow fort competitions, tobogganing and snowball fights.

6 Public Safety

COVID-19 has been a scary time for many families, surrounded by insecurity and uncertainty. With various sources of news across different platforms, parents are unsure on what to do and are looking for a sense of security when returning to recreational facilities.

Publicize cleaning practices

For children to use the facilities, they want to know that every precaution is being taken to protect their children from getting sick. Have a sign at your facility and include a description on your website about your facility's cleaning policies.

Activity policies

To ensure measures are being taken to reduce transmission risks, enact and enforce policies like handwashing, masking, physical distancing, and limited activity spots.

REFERENCES

[1] Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology. Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for the Children and Youth (5-17 years). Ottawa, Canada: 2017. https://csepguidelines.ca/guidelines/children-youth/

[2] Carson, V., Chaput, J. P., Janssen, I., & Tremblay, M. S. (2017). Health associations with meeting new 24-hour movement guidelines for Canadian children and youth. Preventive Medicine, 95(1), 7–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2016.12.005

[3] Janssen, I., Roberts, K. C., & Thompson, W. (2017). Is adherence to the Canadian 24-Hour movement behaviour guidelines for children and youth associated with improved indicators of physical, mental, and social health? Applied Physiology, Nutrition and Metabolism, 42(7), 725–731. https://doi.org/10.1139/apnm-2016-0681

[4] Janz, K. F., Letuchy, E. M., Eichenberger Gilmore, J. M., Burns, T. L., Torner, J. C., Willing, M. C., & Levy, S. M. (2010). Early Physical Activity Provides Sustained Bone Health Benefits Later in Childhood. Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise, 42(6), 1072. https://doi.org/10.1249/MSS.0B013E3181C619B2

[5] Khan MK, Chu YL, Kirk SF, Veugelers PJ. Are sleep duration and sleep quality associated with diet quality, physical activity, and body weight status? A population-based study of Canadian children. Canadian journal of public health. 2015 Jul;106:e277-82. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20031864

[6] Biddle, S. J. H., Ciaccioni, S., Thomas, G., & Vergeer, I. (2019). Physical activity and mental health in children and adolescents: An updated review of reviews and an analysis of causality. Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 42, 146–155. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.PSYCHSPORT.2018.08.011

[7] Castelli, D. M., Hillman, C. H., Buck, S. M., & Erwin, H. E. (2007). Physical fitness and academic achievement in third- and fifth-grade students. Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 29(2), 239–252. https://doi.org/10.1123/jsep.29.2.239

[8] Hellison, D. (2003). Teaching Responsibility Through Physical Activity, 2nd Edn. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

[9] ParticipACTION. The Role of the Family in the Physical Activity, Sedentary and Sleep Behaviours of Children and Youth. The 2020 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. Toronto: ParticipACTION; 2020. https://www.participaction.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/2020-Children-and-Youth-Report-Card.pdf?x34660

[10] ParticipACTION. Lost & Found: Pandemic-related challenges and opportunities for physical activity. The 2022 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. Toronto: ParticipACTION; 2022. https://www.participaction.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/2022-Children-and-Youth-Report-Card.pdf

[11] Ostermeier, E., Tucker, P., Clark, A., Seabrook, J. A., Gilliland, J. (2021). Parents' Report of Canadian Elementary School Children's Physical Activity and Screen Time during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Longitudinal Study. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18(23), 12352. https://doi.org/10.3390/IJERPH182312352

[12] Ostermeier, E., Tucker, P., Tobin, D., Clark, A., & Gilliland, J. (2022). Parents' perceptions of their children's physical activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. BMC Public Health, 22, 1459. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-13829-y