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Physical activity boosts kids' brain health, new report finds – but Canadian kids are still not moving enough

The 2018 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth links brain health with regular physical activity

TORONTO (ONTARIO) June 19, 2018 – ParticipACTION released today its *2018 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth*, which gave Canadian kids a score of D+ for Overall Physical Activity. This grade is particularly alarming considering that this year's Report Card also highlights important connections between physical activity and kids' brain health.

Only 35 per cent of 5- to 17-year-olds and 62 per cent of 3- to 4-year-olds are getting the recommended physical activity levels for their age group, the report card found, and may be having an impact on the health of their brains – kids may be less attentive, moody and not meeting their full potential both in and out of the classroom.

“For decades we’ve talked about how physical activity improves heart health, helps maintain healthy body weights, and builds strong bones and muscles in kids,” said Dr. Mark Tremblay, Chief Scientific Officer, ParticipACTION Report Card and Director of the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute’s Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group (CHEO-HALO). “This year we wanted to dig deeper into what it does for their most complex organ – their brain. From increased cognitive skills to improved mental health, physical activity has profound impacts on kids’ brain health. Yet, we now know that many Canadian children and youth are missing out on these benefits because of a lack of physical activity. So, for their brains’ sake, it’s time to get kids sitting less and moving more.”

The 2018 ParticipACTION Report Card was released in concert for the first time with an evidence-informed *Expert Statement on Physical Activity and Brain Health in Children and Youth*. The Expert Statement was developed by a team of pediatric neuroscientists, exercise scientists, clinicians and practitioners. It finds that for better brain health – including cognition, brain function and mental health – all children and youth should be physically active on a regular basis.

“Regular physical activity, even in short bursts, can help kids’ brains on many levels,” said Dr. Tremblay. “Kids who are more active have increased self-esteem and are generally more focused and less stressed compared to their less active peers. For example, students who exercise before a test show stronger brain function than those who don’t. Furthermore, kids with brain-based disabilities, such as autism spectrum disorder or ADHD, may experience even greater improvements in learning and thinking as a result of regular physical activity.”

The lowest grades in this year’s Report Card are a D+ for Overall Physical Activity, D for Sedentary Behaviours and F for the [24-Hour Movement Behaviours](#). Despite common knowledge of the health benefits of kids moving more, turning away from screens, getting off the couch and breaking a sweat, most of them aren’t, but now they have another pressing reason to do so – for their brain health.

“In order to help support the development of strong, healthy brains we need to encourage kids to get enough daily heart-pumping physical activity,” said Elio Antunes, President and CEO, ParticipACTION. “Research shows that active kids perform better in school and are generally happier. We need to be active role models and set kids up to succeed. I understand that modern life can get in the way of making the time to get active, but I encourage all families to try. And, get outdoors more because it is a powerful antidote for kids facing stress.”

Other grades assigned in the Report Card include:

- “D” for Active Play & Leisure Activities
- “D-” for Active Transportation
- “B” for Organized Sport Participation
- “C-” for Physical Education
- “B+” for Sleep
- “D+” for Physical Literacy
- “D” for Physical Fitness
- “C+” for Family & Peers
- “B-” for School
- “B+” for Community & Environment
- “C+” for Government

Recommendations on how to increase opportunities for physical activity and improve kids’ brain health, including those with brain-based disabilities, can be found within the Expert Statement.

To download the 2018 ParticipACTION Report Card Highlight Report, including the Expert Statement, or Full Report, please visit www.participACTION.com/reportcard.

About the Report Card

The ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth is the most comprehensive assessment of child and youth physical activity in Canada. The Report Card synthesizes data from multiple sources, including the best available peer-reviewed research, to assign evidence-informed grades across 14 indicators. ParticipACTION relies on its strategic partner, The Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute’s Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group (CHEO-HALO), to research, develop and communicate the Report Card. Production of the 2018 ParticipACTION Report Card has been made possible through financial support from Days Inn and provincial and territorial governments through the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council (ISRC).

Partners and funders for the Expert Statement on Physical Activity and Brain Health for Children and Youth include CHEO-HALO, the Kids Brain Health Network, Douglas College and The Organix Foundation.

About ParticipACTION

ParticipACTION is a national non-profit organization that helps Canadians sit less and move more. Originally established in 1971, ParticipACTION works with its partners, which include sport, physical activity, recreation organizations, government and corporate sponsors, to make physical activity a vital part of everyday life. ParticipACTION is generously supported by the Government of Canada. For more information, please visit www.participACTION.com.

For more information, copies of the 2018 ParticipACTION Report Card or to schedule an interview please contact:

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