



**IT'S TIME TO UNPLUG OUR KIDS.**

Canada's Report Card on Physical Activity for Children & Youth ..... *2008*

active  
healthy  
**kids**  
CANADA

# CANADA'S OVERALL GRADE 2008: **D**



Canada's Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth for 2008 is the fourth annual overview of key indicators in relation to the physical activity levels of Canada's young people. While the Report Card is again a comprehensive overview of issues, this year the focus is on screen time and physical activity. Each year, the Research Work Group considers the conceptual guideline established in the inaugural year of the Report Card to assign a grade:

<b>A</b>	Canadian children and youth are active enough and reaching optimal growth and development.
<b>B</b>	Most Canadian children and youth are active enough and reaching optimal growth and development; however, children who are obese, or physically or mentally challenged may not have appropriate physical activity opportunities.
<b>C</b>	Insufficient appropriate physical activity opportunities and programs are available to large segments of Canadian children and youth.
<b>D</b>	Insufficient appropriate physical activity opportunities and programs are available to the majority of Canadian children and youth.
<b>F</b>	Canadian children and youth have a sedentary lifestyle.

The overall grade of D on the Report Card has been consistent from 2005-2008 because definitive and measurable progress is not yet fully evident, demonstrating the need for sustained and increased efforts. The Report Card identifies work in progress and the level of evidence available for each indicator. If the existing evidence is not yet reflecting grade level changes, the Report Card serves as an annual reminder for all of us to keep up our efforts.

## METHODOLOGY



The process to determine indicators and grades each year begins with an interdisciplinary research team, who are responsible for identifying and assessing Report Card indicators based on available data, research, and key issue areas.

Research team members and other experts contribute comprehensive data reports, and additional information is

gathered from the field yielding a review of the current research in all indicator areas. The information is discussed at length to determine grade assignments. Key considerations include: prevalence levels, international comparisons, trends over time, disparities (age, sex, geography, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc.), and examination of newly emerging research and initiatives. Each year we look to improve the process based on input from our partners and stakeholders.

The **Long Form version of the 2008 Report Card** provides more detailed information on data sources and the history and evolution of the Report Card. It provides further information in all indicator areas, citing studies and promising initiatives conducted by various groups, and an examination of newly emerging research. Visit [www.activehealthykids.ca](http://www.activehealthykids.ca) to access the full report.



## 2008 INDICATORS

THE 2008 REPORT CARD EXAMINES INDICATORS THAT INVOLVE ASSESSMENT OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS, AND THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING VARIABLES ASSOCIATED WITH THOSE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS, AMONG CANADIAN CHILDREN AND YOUTH. IT ALSO LOOKS AT THE ROLE OF SOCIETAL INFLUENCES THAT CAN FACILITATE OR INHIBIT PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, INCLUDING FAMILY, SCHOOL, COMMUNITY, AND GOVERNMENT.

	GRADE	CATEGORY	INFORMATION
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY / INACTIVITY	<b>F</b>	PHYSICAL ACTIVITY LEVELS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>90% are not meeting physical activity guidelines</li> <li>Low socioeconomic status is associated with lower physical activity levels</li> </ul>
	<b>F</b>	SCREEN TIME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Studies show many kids spend 4-6 hours in front of a screen each weekday</li> <li>High screen times are now being observed in preschool-aged children</li> </ul>
	<b>C</b>	ORGANIZED SPORT PARTICIPATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sport participation in 15-18 year olds declined from 77% to 59% between 1992 and 2005</li> <li>Those from lower income households have lower sport participation rates</li> </ul>
HEALTH	<b>F</b>	HEALTHY BODY WEIGHT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Screen time is predictive of overweight and obesity</li> <li>Unhealthy excessive body weight continues to be among the highest in the world with concerning new findings indicating this issue as early as 3 years of age</li> </ul>
FAMILY	<b>D</b>	FAMILY PERCEPTIONS AND ROLES REGARDING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physically active youth are 3 times more likely to have parents who are also physically active, but just over half of youth report that they have physically active parents</li> </ul>
	<b>B</b>	ENSURING KIDS ARE ACTIVE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Studies demonstrate that parents support physical activity but that this is primarily for sports and declines as children get older</li> </ul>
SCHOOL	<b>C</b>	SCHOOL-COMMUNITY ASSETS & ENGAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>84% of schools indicate partnerships with community but only 40% directly engage physical activity experts from the community and only 20% engage parents</li> </ul>
	<b>C-</b>	SCHOOL SPORT OPPORTUNITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Studies note 20%-30% of students feel there are not enough school sport opportunities</li> <li>Only 25% of schools have policies for "no cuts"/full participation in school sports</li> </ul>
	<b>D</b>	ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION TO SCHOOL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While there are some promising initiatives, select studies show that just 10% of students use active transportation to get to school</li> </ul>
COMMUNITY AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT	<b>B+</b>	ACCESS TO FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over 90% of parents report that they have good access to programs and facilities, and over 60% report they meet their needs</li> </ul>
	<b>D</b>	USE OF FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only 23% of parents report actually using facilities and programs</li> </ul>
	<b>B+</b>	ACCESS TO PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over 90% of parents report having access to parks and playgrounds, and nearly 60% report they meet their needs</li> </ul>
	<b>D</b>	USE OF PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only 34% of parents report actually using parks and outdoor spaces in their community</li> </ul>
	<b>D</b>	MUNICIPAL REGULATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A survey of municipalities indicated that 96% reported at least 1 by-law that would be considered prohibitive to physical activity in children in youth</li> </ul>
POLICY	<b>C+</b>	PROGRESS ON GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES AND INVESTMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluative information on the various strategies and initiatives being implemented across the country are required</li> <li>Governments at all levels are being called upon to address significant issues with infrastructure to support physical activity</li> <li>There is progress in most jurisdictions but additional sustained investment and leadership is needed</li> </ul>
	<b>C+</b>	SECTOR INVESTMENTS IN RESEARCH, INDUSTRY AND FOUNDATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investment in physical activity research is growing, and some leadership has been demonstrated by the philanthropic and corporate sector, but more is needed</li> </ul>

## THINGS WE NEED TO KNOW: “INCOMPLETE” INDICATORS

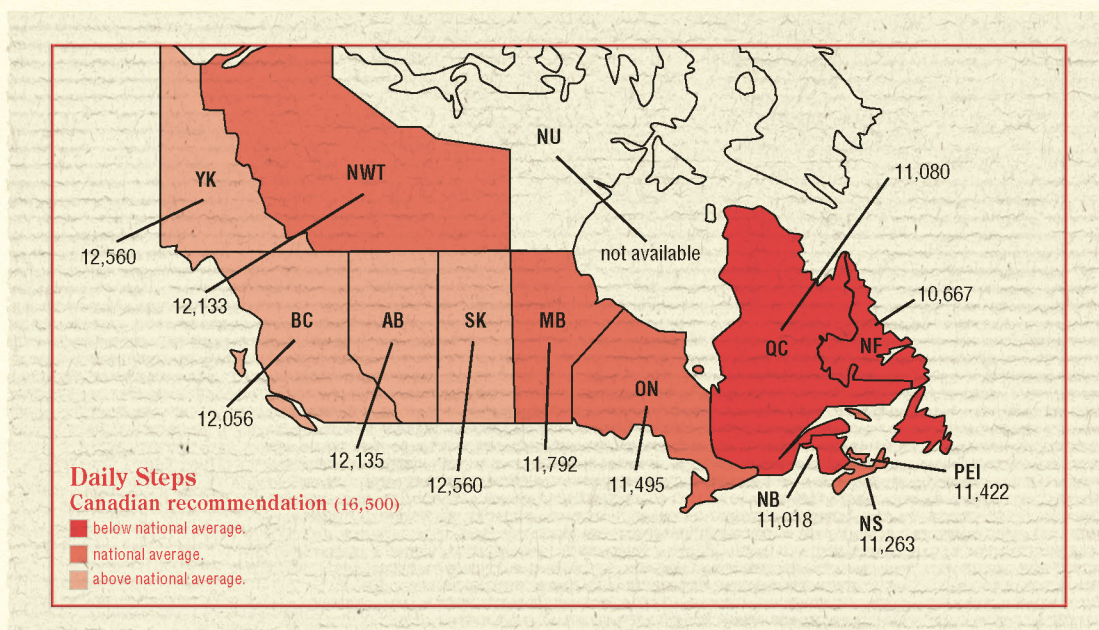
A CRUCIAL PART OF THE REPORT CARD IS TO ALSO POINT OUT KEY INDICATORS THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO PHYSICAL ACTIVITY BUT FOR WHICH WE HAVE INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION TO PROVIDE A GRADE ASSIGNMENT. INDICATORS WITH AN “INC” GRADE INCLUDE:

INDICATOR	CONSIDERATIONS
<b>ACTIVE PLAY</b>	The largest change in children’s time use over the past two decades is a decline in discretionary or free time
<b>PHYSICAL HEALTH</b>	Children and youth with lower physical activity levels demonstrate chronic disease risks previously seen only in adults
<b>MENTAL HEALTH</b>	Research reports associations between improving fitness and depression, anxiety, mood, self-esteem
<b>SLEEP HEALTH</b>	Studies indicate that sleep time in children and youth has decreased by 30-60 minutes per day in the past decade
<b>EFFECTIVE EVALUATION OF SCHOOL PROGRAMMING</b>	There are currently no objective independent measures of the quality or quantity of school programming for physical activity
<b>SCHOOL FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT</b>	Aging school infrastructure is a key issue in every province and territory
<b>URBAN DESIGN</b>	Car-focused urban design correlates with physical inactivity

Key information in these areas is identified in the Long Form Report Card.

### HOW PHYSICALLY ACTIVE ARE CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN MY PROVINCE?

THE FIGURE BELOW DEMONSTRATES THAT IN EACH PROVINCE AND TERRITORY, CHILDREN AND YOUTH ARE FAR FROM MEETING THE RECOMMENDED GUIDELINE FOR DAILY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY. (CANADIAN FITNESS AND LIFESTYLE RESEARCH INSTITUTE – CANPLAY STUDY, 2006)



The long form report card includes other areas where regional breakdowns are illustrated. The goal is to grow the capacity to capture additional regional information in future years, through effective working relationships with provinces and territories to gather and communicate this important information.



## THE NUMBERS ON SCREEN TIME ARE GETTING WORSE

Both the 2006 and 2007 Report Cards provided specific recommendations to reduce screen time. Despite attention to this issue, little progress has been observed and troubling new data has emerged causing the grade to drop to an “F” this year. Considering recommendations from pediatric associations in Canada and the United States, one hour of TV per day is indicated as the maximum for preschoolers. Research indicates Canadian preschoolers are actually approaching two hours of TV viewing per day, and studies have shown this can begin as early as three months of age. With

respect to school-aged children and youth, there are recommendations for no more than two hours per day of TV or leisure-related screen time. Reducing sedentary screen time is also recommended in Canada’s Physical Activity Guidelines.

Each weekday Canadian young people are averaging 5-6 hours and this climbs to between 6-7.5 hours per day on the weekend. Clearly we are drastically out of balance with the recommended guidelines. The data are clear: all children, regardless of background, are spending too much time in front of screens. No sub-group within our population of children and youth is meeting the current recommendations of less than 2 hours per day spent in front of screens.

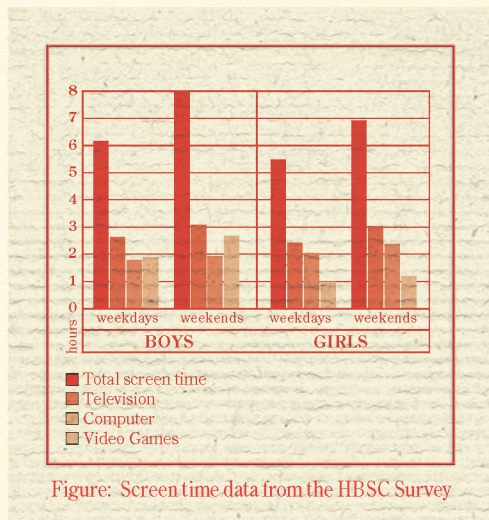


Figure: Screen time data from the HBSC Survey

### KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

- Children with high screen time tend to exhibit low fitness and low self-efficacy for physical activity
- Children with TVs in their bedrooms watch more TV
- Parents are important mediators of their child’s screen time through their own modelling of screen time use and with respect to screen time rules and restrictions
- Screen time is higher among boys when compared to girls and playing video games appears to be responsible for the difference
- Video games that incorporate physical activity demonstrate progress, but this “virtual” experience of physical activity does not provide the same energy expenditure, skill development, social interaction or outdoor benefits that can be found in actual physical activity experiences
- Children and youth report 3-4 hours of screen time use after-school and 6-7.5 hours on weekend days — these are critical time periods for families, schools, and communities to support physical activity opportunities

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REDUCING SCREEN TIME

In order to make definitive progress on this issue we must engage children and youth in the solutions, work collectively and consider various strategies:

### PARENTS

- Remember to role model physical activity and moderation in screen time use
- Plan family time as active time, creating as many opportunities for free play and outdoor play as possible
- Remove TVs/computers from children’s bedrooms and set specific limits on TV, computer and video game time
- Consider screen time allotments for children and youth that are balanced with physical activity time
- Do not rely on “active” video games to get children active; use as a supplement only

### PRACTITIONERS – EDUCATORS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

- Consider implementing a time management segment into the curriculum which includes lessons on reducing screen time and increasing physical activity during the after-school period
- Engage children and youth in initiatives that combine increased physical activity and active play with specific efforts to reduce screen time

### POLICY-MAKERS AND INDUSTRY LEADERS

- Ensure physical activity in children and youth is a top priority on policy agendas, providing sustainable investment, and the development, enhancement, implementation and monitoring of policies and initiatives
- Encourage campaigns that promote reduced screen time and increased active play

### RESEARCHERS

- Evaluate population level strategies to increase level of physical activities and reduce screen time sedentary behaviours
- Conduct research among families to determine if parents limiting their own screen time and/or implementing specific strategies, limits screen time in their children

### PHYSICIANS AND HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

- Be proactive in talking to parents about healthy lifestyles as part of regular visits
- Clearly communicate guidelines for physical activity, and guidelines for screen time use to families



Active Healthy Kids Canada is committed to working in partnership with all levels of government, non-government organizations, researchers, corporations, and foundations, in a collaborative effort to keep Canada's kids active, healthy and happy. We thank all the supporters of the 2008 Report Card.

We are notably grateful to its Report Card development partners, who have played a key role in the research, content development and communication of the Report Card:



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The views expressed in the Report Card do not necessarily represent the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

**Active Healthy Kids Canada was established as a charitable organization in 1994 to advocate the importance of physical activity for children and youth where they live, learn, and play. As a national leader in this area, Active Healthy Kids Canada provides expertise and direction to decision-makers at all levels, in order to increase the attention given to, investment in, and effective implementation of physical activity opportunities for all Canadian children and youth.**

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