

Article

Physical activity levels of Canadian children and youth, 2007 to 2009



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Physical activity levels of Canadian children and youth, 2007 to 2009

Almost 7% of young Canadians meet new physical activity guidelines, with a larger proportion of boys (9%) meeting the guidelines than girls (4%). The majority spend most of their waking hours in sedentary pursuits.

What are the new physical activity guidelines?

World Health Organization and Canadian guidelines recommend the following:

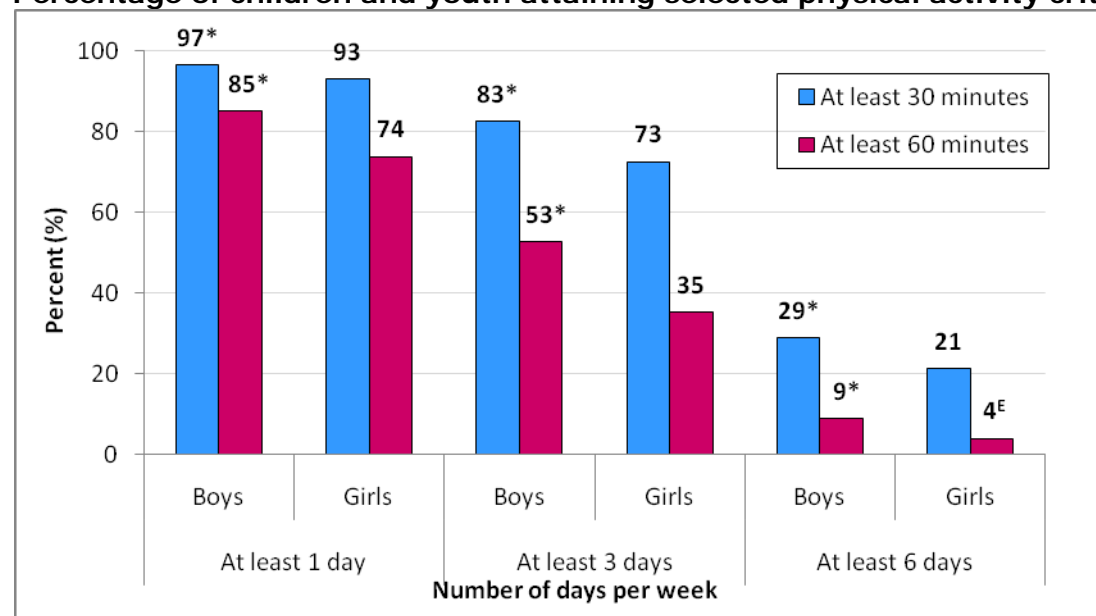
- For health benefits, children (aged 5 to 11) and youth (aged 12 to 17) should accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity activity daily.

Few children achieve the 60 minute per day guideline

Just under 7% of Canadian children and youth achieve the guideline of 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) per day at least 6 days a week. However, when looking at more modest targets, considerably higher percentages accumulate 30 minutes per day on at least 6 days a week, and these averages increase significantly for activity at least 3 days a week.

Chart 1

Percentage of children and youth attaining selected physical activity criteria



^E Use with caution (data with a coefficient of variation from 16.6% to 33.3%)

* significantly different from estimate for girls ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Canadian Health Measures Survey, 2007 to 2009



The proportion of young people accumulating 60 minutes of daily MVPA declines with increasing age.

Overall, boys average just over an hour a day (61 minutes) of MVPA, while girls average about three-quarters of an hour (47 minutes).

The new Canadian physical activity guidelines state that children and youth should include vigorous-intensity activities at least 3 days per week. The vast majority (97%) of MVPA among children and youth is done at moderate intensity. About 4% accumulate 20 minutes of vigorous physical activity at least three days a week, 6% accumulate 10 minutes, and 11% accumulate 5 minutes.

Sedentary time among children and youth averages 8.6 hours a day, or 62% of their waking hours. These averages increase with age, with sedentary time surpassing 9 hours a day among teenagers aged 15 to 19.

Obesity affects physical activity levels of boys, not girls

Overweight and obese boys accumulate 51 and 44 minutes of MVPA per day, respectively, while boys who are neither overweight nor obese average 65 minutes a day. This gradient was not significant among girls – regardless of their body mass index, girls average 44 to 48 minutes of MVPA a day.

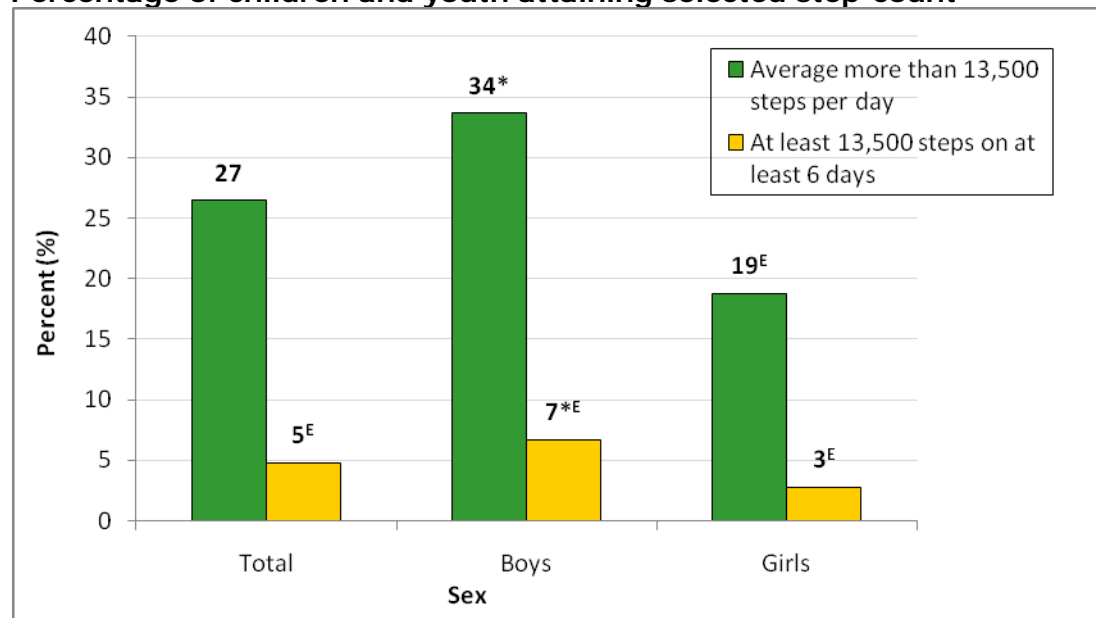
Boys average more steps per day than girls

The step count equivalent to 60 minutes per day of MVPA is 13,500 steps. On average in the Canadian Health Measures Survey (CHMS), 27% accumulate at least 13,500 steps per day. This average step count is significantly higher for boys (34%) than for girls (19%).

According to results of the CHMS, boys average 12,100 steps per day compared with 10,300 for girls.

Chart 2

Percentage of children and youth attaining selected step-count



^E Use with caution (data with a coefficient of variation from 16.6% to 33.3%)

* significantly different from estimate for girls ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Canadian Health Measures Survey, 2007 to 2009



Canadian Health Measures Survey

Adolescents take fewer steps compared with children aged 6 to 10.

Overweight boys average significantly fewer steps than do boys who are neither overweight nor obese, a relationship that does not exist for girls.

Background and further information

The new Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines in this fact sheet are presented by the [Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology](http://www.csep.ca/english/view.asp?x=804) at <http://www.csep.ca/english/view.asp?x=804>.

The CHMS used activity monitors to collect objective measures of physical activity and sedentary behaviour for a nationally representative sample of Canadians aged 6 to 79 from 2007 to 2009.

Some examples of moderate physical activity include bike riding or playground activities, while examples of vigorous activity include running, rollerblading or swimming.

Regular physical activity is associated with a reduced risk of various health conditions, including cardiovascular disease, some types of cancer, osteoporosis, diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, depression, stress and anxiety.

More detailed analyses on the physical activity of Canadians are available in the articles, "[Physical activity of Canadian children and youth: Accelerometer results from the 2007 to 2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey](#)" and "[Physical activity of Canadian adults: Accelerometer results from the 2007 to 2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey](#)", in [Health Reports](#), Vol. 22, no. 1. at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-003-x/2011001-eng.htm>.

Additional physical health measures information from the Canadian Health Measures Survey 2007 to 2009 is available at www.statcan.gc.ca/chms and from the Statistics Canada [health module](#) at <http://www4.statcan.gc.ca/health-sante/index-eng.htm>.



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