



## ACTIVITY BEHAVIOURS



## Physical activity outside of school hours

Overall, one third of youth (34%) report higher levels of physical activity from outside school sources while about half (48%) report moderate levels and one-fifth (19%) report low levels of physical activity.

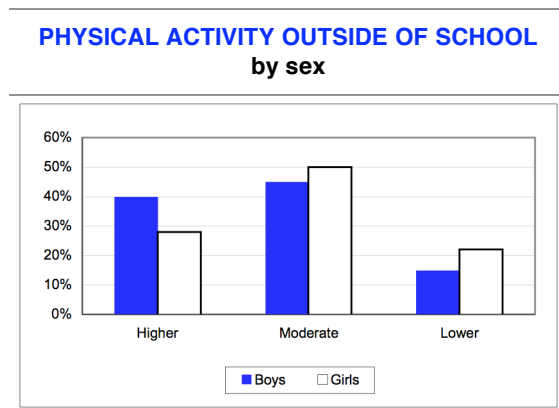
**Age and Grade** There is no clear pattern in physical activity level outside of school hours across age groups or grade level.

**Sex** Boys are more likely than girls to report a high level of physical activity. Two fifths (40%) of boys report seven hours per week or more of moderate activity, while slightly less than one third of girls (28%) report this much. Similarly, girls are more likely to report the lowest number of hours of physical activity.

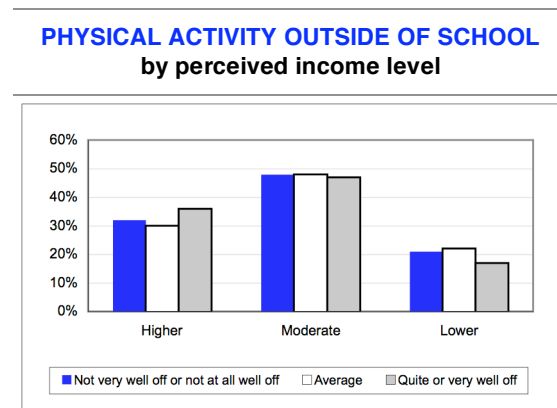
**Income** Slightly more than one third (36%) of youth who believe their families to be quite or very well off report higher levels of physical activity from sources outside of school, while only 32% of those who believe their families to be average or not very well off do the same. Similarly, those with lower perceived family incomes are more likely to report lower levels of activity.

**Neighbourhood environment** Youth who state their neighbourhood is a really good place to live are more likely to report higher levels of physical activity than those who state that their neighbourhood is “good”, “okay” or “not good at all”. Youth who report that they “always” feel safe in their neighbourhood are more likely to report higher levels of participation of physical activity than those who state they feel safe in their neighbourhood only “most of the time” or “never”.

**Discussion** A large proportion of youth are moderately active or inactive. The findings in this survey correspond with findings from the 2000 PAM<sup>8</sup> that point to the alarming levels of physical inactivity in Canadian youth. It is interesting to note that this survey reveals higher levels of physical activity from both outside of school activities and in school for older youth as this is contrary to trends shown in the 2000 PAM. Whether this is a function of the way older youth interpret the question or whether some other factor is at play is unknown. Moreover, it is unknown whether the increase in physical activity over the 5-year span results from better reporting and a higher level of awareness of what counts as physical activity or from true increases.



2002 Health Behaviour in School Aged Children



2002 Health Behaviour in School Aged Children

## Sedentary behaviour

Almost half of all youth (48%) report spending at least six hours a day in sedentary activities such as watching TV, doing homework and using a computer outside of school hours. Less than 10% reported spending less than three hours per day and the remaining 45% reported spending between three and six hours in these activities.

**Age and Grade** There are only small grade differences and no differences among age groups in the amount of time youth report engaging in sedentary behaviour each day.

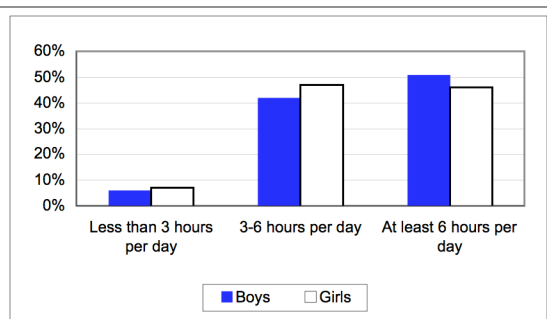
**Sex** More boys (51%) than girls (46%) report watching TV, doing homework or using a computer for at least six hours per day.

**Income** There is no difference in the number of hours that youth report in sedentary activities by family income.

**Neighbourhood Environment** Feeling safe in one's neighbourhood is unrelated to the amount of time that youth report in sedentary behaviour. However those that believe that their neighbourhood is a really good place to live are less likely (47%) to report 6 or more hours of sedentary behaviour per day than those who feel their neighbourhood is 'ok' at best (54%).

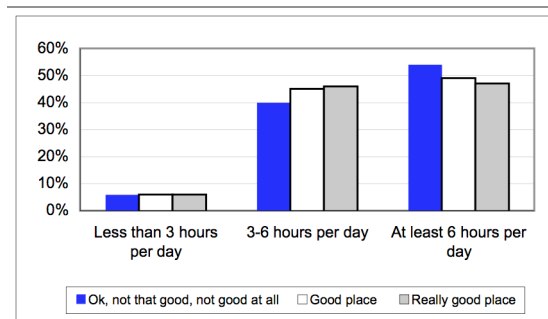
**Discussion** Studies<sup>9,10,11</sup> have found that time spent watching television and playing video games is not associated with physical activity, but physical activity is positively associated with productive sedentary behaviour, computer use and time spent reading or doing homework. It has been suggested that messages and advice aimed at reducing time spent in sedentary activities should be targeted at television and video use instead of time spent reading, doing homework, or using a computer. Environments that are more conducive to physical activity and active living would support youth to be more physically active. This can be achieved by limiting sedentary behaviours and providing access to equipment and spaces for physical activity at home and in the community, and promoting physical activity as fun and enjoyable.<sup>12</sup> Canada's Physical Activity Guide for Children and Youth guidelines state that youth should not only increase their physical activity by at least 30 minutes *more* a day to *start* but that they should also reduce sedentary or "non-active" time including watching television, videos, and playing computer games by *at least* 30 minutes a day to *start*.

**SEDENTARY BEHAVIOUR  
by sex**



2002 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children

**SEDENTARY BEHAVIOUR  
by neighbourhood quality**



2002 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children

## Class time physical activity

Forty-five percent (45%) of youth reported spending an hour or less per week in physical activity during class time while an additional 40% reported spending between two and four hours a week. Only 15% of youth reported spending five or more hours in physical activity during class time.

**Age and Grade** Fifteen-year-olds are the most likely to report five hours or more of in-class physical activity (23%), while no more than 15% of youth in all other age groups receive this much. Youth in grades nine and ten are more likely than youth in other grades to report at least five hours per week or more in class-time physical activities. More than one in four youth in grade ten (27%), and one in five (19%) in grade nine report this much in-class physical activity, while no more than 12% of youth in grades six through eight report as much.

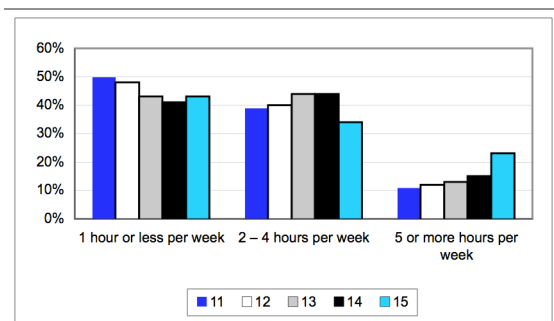
**Sex** Forty-seven percent (47%) of girls report spending an hour or less of physical activity during class time at school, while 42% of boys report the same. Boys are slightly more likely to report spending five hours or more (18%) than girls (12%).

**Income** Those who report that they think their family is not very well off or not at all well off are more likely to report (49%) that they spend an hour a week or less in class time physical activity than are those who report their family is quite or very well off (44%).

**Neighbourhood Environment** Those who report feeling safe in their neighbourhood never or only sometimes are more likely to report spending only one hour a week or less in class time physical activity than those who always feel safe. The perceived quality of one's neighbourhood bears no relation to the reported amount of class time physical activity.

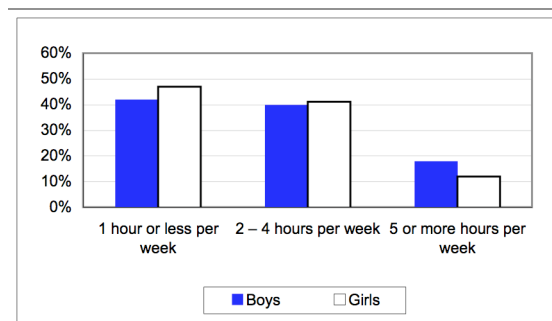
**Discussion** The fact that youth in grades nine and ten spend more time participating in physical activity in class than do those in younger grades likely reflects requirements for more hours of physical education class time in these grades. However, youth in grades nine and ten who report spending five or more hours per week in class time physical activity may not be sustaining this level for the entire year. It may be that only to those who have physical education during the same semester as the survey are reporting this level of activity. Schools could address the low level of class time physical activity in the younger grades and ensure that there are physical activity opportunities for youth who do not have physical education on their timetable during a given semester. Some provinces and territories have attempted to address this issue by promoting or legislating mandatory daily physical activity in schools.<sup>13,14</sup>

**CLASS TIME PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**  
by age



2002 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children

**CLASS TIME PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**  
by sex



2002 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children

## Free-time physical activity at school

Half of youth (51%) reported spending an hour or less per week in free time physical activity at school while 31% spent between two and four hours. Only 18% spent five or more hours per week in this type of activity.

**Age and Grade** There is no difference across age or grade levels in how much time youth report spending in physical activity during their free time at school.

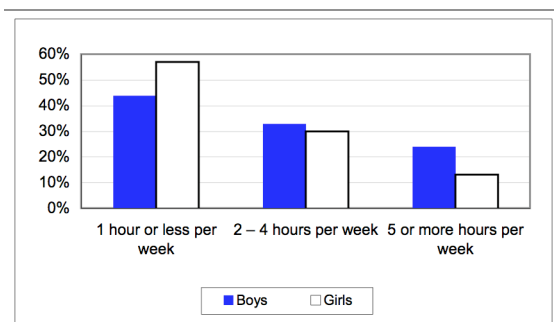
**Sex** Girls are far more likely than boys to report spending only one hour or less per week in physical activity in free time at school. Almost six in ten girls (57%) report no more than one hour per week of physical activity during their free time at school, compared with four in ten (44%) boys. Almost one quarter of boys report spending five hours or more of physical activity in their free time at school (24%) per week, while only 13% of girls report this much.

**Income** There is no relationship between the number of hours spent in free-time physical activity at school and reported family income level.

**Neighbourhood Environment** Youth who feel less safe or believe their neighbourhood is ‘ok’ at best in which to live are more likely to spend only an hour or less in free time physical activity at school than those who report that they ‘always’ feel safe in their neighbourhood and those that believe their neighbourhood is a really good place.

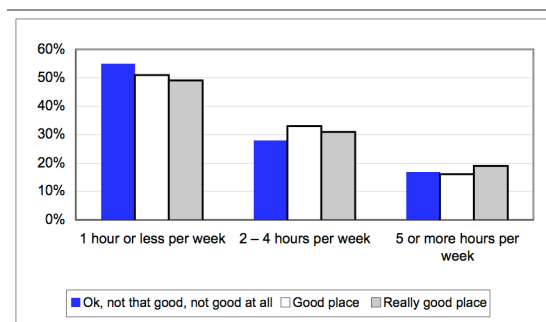
**Discussion** The substantial sex difference in reported engagement in physical activity during free-time at school suggests that schools could do more to encourage girls to participate in extra curricular physical activity opportunities, by providing positive role models, providing skills training to increase their feelings of competency and to provide opportunities that they would enjoy. Schools can provide more opportunities for physical activity and “active” learning throughout the school day, promote teacher or volunteer supervision and role-modeling of active behaviours, encourage “prompting” of physical activity during recess periods by teachers, and promote extracurricular and intramural physical activities which offer a variety of unstructured and structured opportunities.

**FREE TIME PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AT SCHOOL  
by sex**



2002 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children

**FREE TIME PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AT SCHOOL  
by neighbourhood quality**



2002 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children

## *Activity behaviours summary*

Physical activity outside of school is relatively limited. One-third of youth (34%) report higher levels of physical activity outside of school hours, yet half report spending at least six hours a day in sedentary activities such as watching TV, doing homework and using a computer outside of school hours.

Analyses from the 1994 HBSC survey reported that one in five youth accumulated the recommended seven hours of physical activity per week and that just over one quarter of boys (27%) and 12% of girls reported being active for seven or more hours per week. Both boys and girls are more likely to report being active in 2001/02 than they were in 1994. While it appears that both boys and girls are more active outside of school hours in 2001/02 than five years previously, there continues to be large proportion of youth who are moderately active or inactive.

Physical activity during school hours is even more limited than that accumulated outside of school. Almost half of youth report an hour or less per week in physical activity during class time while an additional 40% reported spending between two and four hours a week. This leaves a meagre 15% who spend roughly one hour a day (5 or more hours a week) in physical activity during class time in a typical school week. Just as important, half of youth report spending an hour or less per week in free time physical activity at school. In an average school week, this would translate to roughly 12 minutes a day! Only 18% spent five or more hours per week in this type of activity, or roughly 1 hour a day.

The amount of sedentary time spent outside of school, coupled with the fact that most students spend the majority of their time at school in sedentary behaviour as well, make findings presented in this section particularly worrisome. Schools have an important role to play in promoting lifelong physical activity. They have access to a large proportion of children and youth for the better part of a waking weekday. Schools typically have the facility, social and communications aspects already in place.

In addition to these revealing statistics, policy-makers and schools must also consider other important data:

- Three out of five Canadian children and youth (aged 5–17) are not active enough for optimal growth and development.<sup>5</sup>
- Children's activity levels decrease with age, going from 49% who are sufficiently active among grade-school children (aged 5–12) to 36% among teenagers (aged 13–17).<sup>5</sup>
- Girls are less active than boys, where 38% of girls and 48% of boys are considered active enough for optimal health benefits. These sex differences appear for both children and adolescents.<sup>5</sup>
- Teenage girls are more likely than teenage boys to participate in social dancing, exercise classes or aerobics, cross-country skiing, and ballet or other dance classes. However, teenage boys are more likely than girls to engage in bicycling, skateboarding, snowboarding, golf, weight training, and many team sports.<sup>5</sup>

- Teenagers are less likely than younger children to play outdoors after school. Boys are reportedly more likely than girls to play outdoors after school, and youth overall are more likely than younger children to report a preference for organized activities.<sup>5</sup>
- Over 50% of children and youth rely solely on inactive modes of transportation to travel to and from school, with a further 21% typically using inactive modes for at least part of the journey. Furthermore, it found that adolescents are more likely than children to commute to school using sedentary forms of transport.<sup>5</sup>