Kids CAN PLAY!

Encouraging children to be active at home, at school, and in their communities

Activity levels of children and youth in Ontario

Average Steps The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute's Canadian Physical Activity Levels Among Youth (CANPLAY) study measures physical activity levels of children and youth by using pedometers to measure daily steps. Most of the analyses in this bulletin are based on combined data collected in year three and four (2007-2009) of data collection (unless otherwise stated).

During this time period, children and youth (between the ages of 5 and 19) in Ontario took an average of 11,800 steps; this number is not significantly different from the national rate. There has been no significant change in the number of steps taken by children living in Ontario since 2005-07 combined.

Compared to other regions across Canada, children and youth in Ontario take:

- more steps than those living in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia;
- fewer steps than those in British Columbia and Yukon; and
- a similar number of steps to those in other provinces or territories.

Child characteristics

Similar to national findings, children and youth living in Ontario take more steps if they are:

FIGURE 1
Average steps, overall, Ontario and Canada

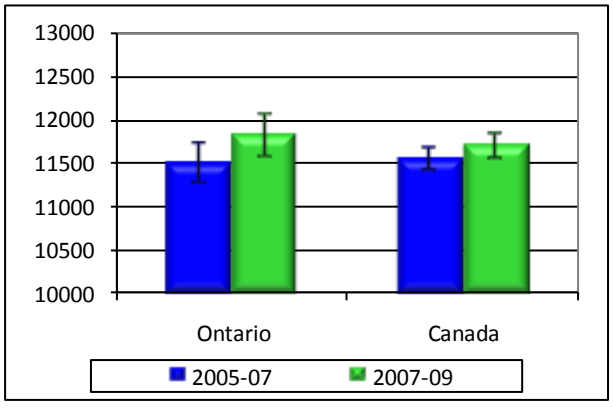

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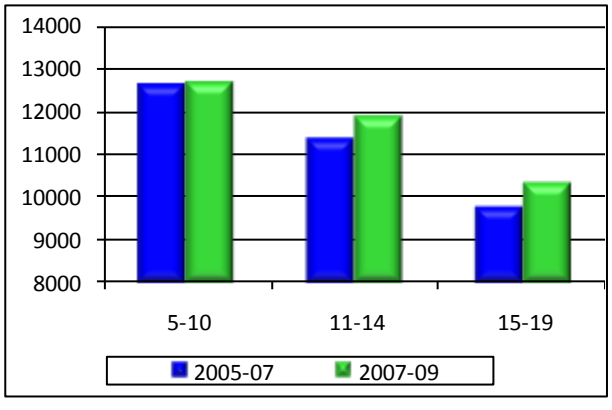
FIGURE 2
Average steps, by child age, Ontario



CANPLAY 2005 - 2009, CFLRI

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- Younger children (age 5 to 14) compared to older youth;
- Boys compared to girls (age-related decreases appear for both genders); and
- Participants in organized physical activity and sport compared to those who are not.

Parent and household characteristics

In Ontario, certain parental or household characteristics are associated with higher steps in children:

- University educated parents compared to those with a secondary level of education
- Highest income households ($100,000 or greater) compared to those with low incomes ($20,000-$29,999)
- Slightly more active parents compared to those who are slightly less active than their peers

How many steps are sufficient for children and youth to be healthy?

How many steps are required to be healthy? No definitive guidelines have been established regarding the number of steps required for health benefits for children and youth. However, several criteria have been suggested, and they are described below.

Canada's Physical Activity Guide (CPAG) for children and youth sets a goal that children add 90 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous activity to the incidental activities required by daily living,[1,2] which translates roughly into 16,500 steps daily. When using this criterion, 86% of children and youth in 2007-09 living in Ontario do not accumulate enough daily steps associated with the guidelines; this proportion does not differ significantly from the national average. In Ontario, the proportion not meeting this criterion has not changed significantly since 2005-07.

15,000 step criterion for children and youth is based on a research study that suggests 120 to 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous activity (here considered an equivalent of 15,000 steps) for both boys and girls is required for health.[2,3] Using this criterion, 80% of children and youth in 2007-09 living in Ontario do not accumulate enough daily steps associated with the 15,000 criterion. This proportion does not differ significantly from the national average and similarly, has not significantly changed within the province since 2005-07.

BMI-referenced criteria for children and youth is based on a research study that suggests that accumulating 12,000 daily steps for girls (6 to 12 years of age) and 15,000 steps for boys of this age is associated with a healthy body mass index (BMI).[4] Using these criteria, 69% of children and youth in Ontario do not accumulate enough daily steps; this proportion does not differ significantly from the national average. As with the other two criteria, the proportion in 2007-09 not meeting these criteria is similar to the rate in 2005-07.

Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of children and youth living in Ontario that are more likely not to meet each of the three criteria.

TABLE 1
Characteristics of children and youth who do not meet step criteria, Ontario

	CPAG criterion	15,000 step criterion	BMI-referenced criteria
Overall proportion	86%	80%	69%
Change from 2005-07	No change	No change	No change
Provincial comparisons	Fewer children in ON do not meet criteria compared to PEI, NS, NB and QC	Fewer children in ON do not meet criteria compared to PEI and NB	Fewer children in ON do not meet criteria compared to NB More children in ON do not meet criteria compared to BC and YT
Child characteristics	Girls more than boys Older youth more than younger children Those not participating in sport	Girls more than boys Older youth more than younger children Those not participating in sport	Boys more than girls Older youth more than younger children Those not participating in sport
Parental and household characteristics	Unlike nationally, no relationships		Slightly less active parents versus those substantially more active than peers

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References

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