

September 7, 2022

For Immediate Release

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Chicago Children Not Getting Enough Physical Activity

Parents Can Empower Their Children to Exercise

Despite the overwhelming benefits of physical activity and fitness in growing children, the latest survey from [Voices of Child Health in Chicago](#) at [Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago](#) revealed that most Chicago children are not getting enough exercise.

In fact, the survey found that only one-third of children ages 1 to 5 years old were physically active most days of the week, contrary to recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The survey from the hospital's [Voices of Child Health in Chicago](#) found:

- Only 1 in 3 children engaged in physical activity most days of the week.
- Both younger children and elementary-aged children were getting less exercise than recommended.
- Parents may not be aware that their kids are not getting enough exercise.

"Results from our study show that many children aren't getting enough physical activity. Parents can talk with their child's health care provider about how much physical activity children is right for their child and about ways to encourage children to incorporate more physical activity in their daily routines," said Matthew M. Davis, MD, MAPP, Chair of the Department of Medicine at Lurie Children's, Executive Vice-President and Chief Community Health Transformation Officer at the Patrick M. Magoon Institute for Healthy Communities at Lurie Children's and Chair of Pediatrics at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.

Obesity can lead to a host of other health problems for children including early onset heart disease, high cholesterol, liver disease and type 2 diabetes. Exercise prevents these and has a myriad of other benefits by promoting better sleep, improved mood, healthy muscles and bones, coordination and social skills.

In the survey, only one-third of 1-5-year-olds had enough daily physical activity to meet AAP and WHO recommendations, which call for active play four or more days of the week. For children ages 6-7, 43 percent met AAP guidelines that call for physical activity four or more days of the week.

Physical activity in early childhood and elementary school can include all things that help keep children fit such as jumping rope, tag and hopscotch, and traditional sports such as running, swimming or baseball.

“Encouraging physical activity for kids is a great way for parents to help children establish healthy routines early in their lives. Families can also use physical activity as way to spend quality time together as family, such as playing at the playground, going for a walk, or playing a game of tag,” said Dr. Davis.

Although many children in the survey did not meet recommendations for daily physical activity, a majority of parents (68 percent) stated that their child was either “very much” or “quite a bit” physically active on a typical day. This may suggest that parents are not aware of their child’s lack of exercise, according to survey organizers.

For help, parents can turn to the AAP’s [physical activity checker stopwatch](#), a resource to assist them so their children can meet physical activity recommendations. Parents can also help by incorporating walks or games into their families’ routines that involve exercise.

This report is based on data from the Voices of Child Health in Chicago Parent Panel Survey. The survey is administered to a sample of Chicago parents by Lurie Children’s and NORC at the University of Chicago via internet and telephone. The survey is administered to parents from all 77 community areas in Chicago three times each year. The data in this report was collected from October through November 2021. The overall sample consisted of 1,142 Chicago parents, step-parents, or guardians who had at least one child under 18 years of age in the household (referred to as “parents” in this report). For this report, the focus was on a subset of parents of children ages 1-7 years old who answered questions about their child’s physical activity.

Population-focused child health research at Lurie Children’s is conducted through the Mary Ann & J. Milburn Smith Child Health Research, Outcomes, and Evaluation Center at the Stanley Manne Children’s Research Institute. The Manne Research Institute is focused on improving child health, transforming pediatric medicine and ensuring healthier futures through the relentless pursuit of new knowledge. Lurie Children’s is ranked as one of the nation’s top children’s hospitals in *U.S. News & World Report*. It is the pediatric training ground for Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. Last year, the hospital served more than 223,000 children from all 50 states, Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico, and 37 countries.

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