

# REGULAR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY VITAL TO CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING: PARTICIPACTION

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more challenging.

"We've definitely seen a huge drop in physical activity, which is to be expected with these kids not in school, they're not with their friends, they're not in sports," she said.

In its 2020 report card, ParticipACTION — a non-profit that promotes healthy and active lifestyle in Canada — gave children and teens a D+ grade for overall physical activity.

According to the report, only 39 per cent of those aged 5-17 met the physical activity recommendation within the Canadian 24-hour movement guidelines for children and youth. The guidelines provide a holistic look at daily exercise, sedentary behaviour like screen time, and sleep habits.

Extended screen time from being cooped up indoors could keep them from achieving the benefits

normally associated with being physically active, Obeid said.

## BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR PLAY

"When you're active, you're going to have better heart health. You're going to build stronger bones. You're going to maintain a healthier body weight," she said.

She added that being active outdoors is associated with improved mental health outcome and improved cognitive outcome for decision-making and problem solving.

There are also benefits to playing outdoors with friends, according to Obeid.

"It improves their ability to co-operate better with people, to get along with their friends, to build relationships, to feel a sense of belonging," she said. "As they grow up, they will also need those skills to get along at school and then in work and in life."



Halton Hills photo

The ActiveEasy Chalk Challenge is one of the initiatives the Town of Halton Hills introduced to encourage children and youth to stay active.

## MODIFIED SUMMER PROGRAMS

Cathyann White, regional vice president of health, fitness and aquatics with Oakville YMCA, said that "it's been a difficult period of isolation" for many.

"Summer camps are very important for children, and I think particularly right now, we know our families are looking for ways for their children to re-engage in the community," she said, adding that they're still looking into the possibility of running "a modest" camp program.

The same goes for municipal-run programs.

The Town of Halton

Hills will roll out virtual summer programming through an online platform starting June 29 that features daily activities for children aged 4-12, focusing on physical activity, healthy choices, creativity, exploration and appreciation.

In Milton, regional councillor Mike Cluett said in a recent Facebook post that the Town camp programs give opportunities for children to "learn new skills, meet new friends, and create lifelong memories." A spokesperson with the Town said the decision to offer a scaled-back camping experience is still being considered.

The City of Burlington is planning to gradually introduce summer youth programming, including a smaller version of day camps (consisting of eight participants and two staff) at some community centres. The details are still being finalized.

Similarly, the Town of Oakville is contemplating running modified camps at select community centres — with details to be shared soon.

## WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

When it comes to encouraging children to be more active, Obeid says that parents are doing their best during the pandemic.

While everybody's circumstances are different, the best advice she can give for parents is to regularly go out for walks with their kids and take advantage of the green spaces that are available — either on the trails or just around the block.

And if things get too hectic to take a stroll, she says: "Tomorrow's a new day; don't beat yourself up."

*STORY BEHIND THE STORY: With the COVID-19 pandemic still very much with us, local parents are no doubt anxious to find ways to keep their children active, especially with the summer officially here.*

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