Physical Activity Facts

- Regular physical activity in childhood and adolescence improves strength and endurance, helps build healthy bones and muscles, helps control weight, reduces anxiety and stress, increases self-esteem, and may improve blood pressure and cholesterol levels.¹
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends that young people aged 6–17 years participate in at least 60 minutes of physical activity daily.²
- In 2011, 29% of high school students surveyed had participated in at least 60 minutes per day of physical activity on all 7 days before the survey, and only 31% attended physical education class daily.³
- Schools can promote physical activity through comprehensive school physical activity programs, including recess, classroom-based physical activity, intramural physical activity clubs, interscholastic sports, and physical education.
- Schools should ensure that physical education is provided to all students in all grades and is taught by qualified teachers.
- Schools can also work with community organizations to provide out-of-school-time physical activity programs and share physical activity facilities.

Physical Activity and the Health of Young People

Benefits of Regular Physical Activity

Regular physical activity—

- Helps build and maintain healthy bones and muscles.¹
- Helps reduce the risk of developing obesity and chronic diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and colon cancer.¹
- Reduces feelings of depression and anxiety and promotes psychological well-being.¹
- May help improve students’ academic performance, including
  - Academic achievement and grades
  - Academic behavior, such as time on task
  - Factors that influence academic achievement, such as concentration and attentiveness in the classroom.⁴

Long-Term Consequences of Physical Inactivity

- Overweight and obesity, which are influenced by physical inactivity and poor diet, can increase one’s risk for diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, asthma, arthritis, and poor health status.⁵-⁷
- Physical inactivity increases one’s risk for dying prematurely, dying of heart disease, and developing diabetes, colon cancer, and high blood pressure.¹

Participation in Physical Activity by Young People

- In a nationally representative survey, 77% of children aged 9–13 years reported participating in free-time physical activity during the previous 7 days.⁴
- In 2011, only 29% percent of high school students had participated in at least 60 minutes per day of physical activity on each of the 7 days before the survey.³
- Fourteen percent of high school students had not participated in 60 or more minutes of any kind of physical activity on any day during the 7 days before the survey.³
- Participation in physical activity declines as young people age.³
Percentage of High School Students Participating in Physical Activity and Physical Education, by Sex, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Activity</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At least 60 minutes/day of physical activity (a)</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended physical education class daily (b)</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>34.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(a\) Any kind of physical activity that increased heart rate and made them breathe hard some of the time for at least 60 minutes per day on each of the 7 days before the survey.

\(b\) Attended physical education classes 5 days in an average week when they were in school.

Participation in Physical Education Classes

- In 2011, over half (52%) of high school students (68% of 9th-grade students but only 38% of 12th-grade students) attended physical education classes in an average week.  
- The percentage of high school students who attended physical education classes daily decreased from 42% in 1991 to 25% in 1995 and remained stable at that level until 2011 (31%).
- In 2011, 41% of 9th-grade students but only 24% of 12th-grade students attended physical education class daily.

Key Resources

- Comprehensive School Physical Activity Programs: A Guide for Schools
- School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity
- Physical Education Curriculum Analysis Tool
- Youth Physical Activity Guidelines Toolkit
- The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, Physical Education, and Academic Performance
- Executive Summary

References