

GET THE FACTS:

Physical Activity is Key for Young Kids' Health (Ages 3 through 5)

Early childhood is a critical time to establish movement skills and learn healthy habits. Regular physical activity is vital for healthy growth and development.

- ▶ Being active improves bone health,¹⁻³ helps maintain a healthy weight,^{2,3} and strengthens important muscles in the bodies of young children.¹

Young kids should get at least three hours each day of total physical activity to enhance their growth and development.^{3,5}

- ▶ Many (but not all) young children get recommended levels of physical activity.^{4,5}
- ▶ Participating in a variety of activities like playing dress up, or more moderate intensity activities like riding tricycles, and more vigorous intensity activities like skipping and jumping helps young children grow up healthy.
- ▶ However, only about one-third of kids' physical activity during child care hours is done at moderate-to-vigorous intensity levels.⁶

Increasing physical activity in early care and education settings is a national health priority.⁷

- ▶ Only about one-third of physical activity that happens during a child's time in an early care and education setting is done at moderate-to-vigorous intensity levels.⁶ Most opportunities should allow for moderate-to-vigorous intensity movements, like running.⁸
- ▶ Every day, early educators can offer multiple active play opportunities, like playing on a playground, in addition to structured activities, like playing tag.
 - ✓ Planning safe, fun outdoor activities that can occur in imperfect weather^{7,8,9} and integrating physical activity into educational lessons can help children move more.^{4,10}
- ▶ Young kids are generally physically active in short bursts,^{8,11} so offering a variety of activities and opportunities throughout the day can help young kids accumulate enough movement.
- ▶ While in early care and education settings, all young children should have about 15 minutes per hour of active and outdoor play opportunities (or about two hours per eight-hour day in care).^{4,8}





Early care and education settings are important places for helping the children who spend time there to move more.¹¹

- ▶ Having open spaces and accessible portable play equipment, like balls or soft building blocks, can promote physical activity for all children,^{4,12-14} even in smaller early care spaces.
- ▶ Children should have daily opportunities to play outside.^{4,8,13}
- ▶ Early care educators can support physical activity through:
 - ✓ Modifying games and activities to help all children stay moving throughout the duration of the activity, including children with disabilities or lower fitness levels.^{15,16}
 - ✓ Participating in physical activity with the children.* This motivates children to move,^{10,17} especially those who are less active.¹⁷
 - ✓ Sharing ideas for games to play or suggesting ways to go back into games to help children stay moving.¹⁷
 - ✓ Not taking physical activity opportunities away from children as a punishment.^{4,8}

*Added benefit!

Initiating and engaging in physical activity with children can help educators be more physically active too. Being physically active reduces the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and depression and also leads to better sleep and less anxiety.³

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

See the list of references for this fact sheet: www.hsph.harvard.edu/prc/priority-areas/physical-activity/pa-young-kids-fact-sheet

The following additional resources may be useful to:

- ✓ *Help children move more*
 - Stolley M. Hip Hop to Health Jr. SNAP-Ed Toolkit. Available at <https://snapedtoolkit.org/interventions/programs/hip-hop-to-health-jr>
 - Go NAP SACC (Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care). Available at <https://gonapsacc.org>
- ✓ *Provide more guidance on physical activity and young children*
 - Early Care and Education. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2021. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/strategies/childcareece.html>
 - Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd Edition. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2018. Available at https://health.gov/sites/default/files/2019-09/Physical_Activity_Guidelines_2nd_edition.pdf
 - Health Benefits of Physical Activity for Children. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2022. Available at <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/adults/health-benefits-of-physical-activity-for-children.html>

SUGGESTED CITATION

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