

Active Living Research

Using Evidence to Prevent Childhood Obesity
and Create Active Communities

FACT SHEET

July 2012

After-school Programs Can Promote Physical Activity

After-school programs are an important setting for promoting physical activity and preventing obesity. Nationwide, more than 8 million children and adolescents spend an average of eight hours per week in after-school programs. Although physical activity standards exist for after-school programs and summer camps, many of them lack clearly defined benchmarks, making it difficult to monitor compliance with policies and to evaluate their effectiveness.

This fact sheet highlights research on physical activity in after-school programs and examines how policies can help after-school programs more effectively promote physical activity and prevent obesity among children.

Children who attend after-school programs get some physical activity, but not enough.

- Children accumulate 13 to 24 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each day at after-school programs. This is less than half of the minimum national recommendation for physical activity.

Physical activity policies in after-school programs lack consistent standards.

- Across the nation, policies related to providing physical activity in after-school programs varied widely in language.
- The majority of existing policies for after-school physical activity programs are not evidence-based, despite claiming to be.

FAST FACTS

- 14 states have adopted policies and national standards have been developed to help increase the amount of physical activity children accumulate while attending after-school programs.
- Children accumulate 13 to 24 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each day at after-school programs.

This fact sheet highlights findings from the research brief *Policies and Standards for Promoting Physical Activity in After-school Programs*



Full research brief is available at:
<http://www.activelivingresearch.org/afterschool>

Scan with a QR code reader to view the full brief:



For more information on Active Living Research, visit: www.activelivingresearch.org/

Some strategies to increase physical activity in after-school programs have been successful. However, more interventions need to be evaluated for their effectiveness.

- A comprehensive review of 13 physical activity interventions conducted across numerous after-school programs found that the amount of time children spent being active during the after-school program increased by as much as 17 percent following the interventions.
- One study found modest increases (of up to 10 minutes per day) in the total daily amount of time children spent in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity. This was achieved by allocating time for physical activity, involving staff in activities or making other changes to better support physical activity in after-school programs.
- There are more than 52 physical activity programs that after-school programs can purchase. However, it is unclear how many of the physical activity programs have been evaluated for effectiveness.

Summary

After-school programs have the potential to help children accumulate up to 30 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity each day, which would satisfy half of the national recommendation for daily physical activity. Such a goal is a reasonable expectation based on the amount of time after-school programs typically allocate for physical activity. Yet more efforts are needed to better support physical activity in the after-school setting. In addition, after-school programs should be evaluated to see if they are facilitating adequate amounts of physical activity to meet policy goals.