

The Importance of Physical Activity for Children and Youth in Kenya

Children and youth need opportunities to be physically active in order to grow, learn, thrive, and be happy. Active and healthy children and youth are likely to be attentive in class and, in the long term, achieve academic success. Unhealthy eating habits and physical inactivity contribute to the acceleration of chronic disease development, and these behaviours and consequences may follow throughout adulthood. The primary goal of encouraging appropriate physical activity in the young is to promote good health attitudes, knowledge, and behaviours early in life that will continue into adulthood.

There is a lack of nationally representative data on physical activity among Kenyan children and youth. Data on the tracking or surveillance of coronary heart disease risk factors from childhood to young adulthood in Kenya is also lacking. A pattern of inactivity and sedentary behaviour often begins early in life and has the potential to persist throughout one's life resulting in a loss of health and productivity, making the promotion of physical activity among children imperative. Kenya, like most developing countries, is currently experiencing a nutrition and physical activity transition. This transition is reflected in the increasing prevalence of both obesity and physical inactivity as major risk factors contributing to the burden of non-communicable diseases. Such a transition has serious implications with respect to public health outcomes, risk factors, and economic growth, and hence needs to be addressed if we are to adequately manage the double burden of infectious and non-infectious diseases, particularly in developing countries. It is with this reality in mind that Kenya's 2011 Report Card on the Physical Activity and Body Weight of Children and Youth has been prepared.

Healthy Active Kids Kenya

The first of its kind, Kenya's 2011 Report Card on the Physical Activity and Body Weight of Children and Youth provides a baseline assessment of the state of affairs on the physical activity patterns and body weights of Kenyan children and youth. The goal is to highlight the areas where Kenya is succeeding as a nation and emphasise areas where more action is needed, in order to realise healthy active living goals for children and youth. Healthy Active Kids Kenya (HAKK) plans to produce the Report Card periodically as a means of monitoring healthy active living behaviours of Kenyan children and youth and as a means of holding us all accountable for the future health of our children. The Declaration on the Rights of the Child states that the child, by reason of his/her physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care including provision of adequate standards of living for physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development. Measures ought to be taken to support parents and other caregivers to implement this fundamental right. Since we are aware of the harmful effects of physical inactivity and obesity on the health of children and youth, it becomes a foremost responsibility to act to preserve healthy and active living behaviours for their well-being.

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Kenya's 2011 Report Card on the Physical Activity and Body Weight of Children and Youth



Prepared and produced by
HEALTHY ACTIVE KIDS KENYA
in partnership with **ACTIVE HEALTHY KIDS CANADA**



Indicator	Grade	Summary
Physical Activity Active Play Active Transportation	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About 72% of Kenyan children and youth were classified as physically active as per the global WHO guidelines for physical activity. There is emerging evidence of disparities across age, sex, and socioeconomic status. Studies show that children from rural Kenya are more physically active than their urban counterparts with a mean average steps per day (\pm SE) of $14,700 \pm 521$ versus $11,717 \pm 561$ ($p < 0.0001$) for rural and urban Kenyan children respectively. 70 % of urban Kenyan and 34% of rural Kenyan parents reported being more active during childhood than their children. There are limited data or published papers on the mode of transportation used by Kenyan children and youth. The same applies to active play. Over 50% of Kenyan athletes ran to school each day and covered over 5 km.
Screen Time TV Viewing Computer/Internet Use Video Game Playing	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Studies show that a large proportion (50%) of children in urban Kenya spend over 2 hours per week on screen time activities compared to 30% of children in rural Kenya.
Sports Participation	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It has been reported that 87% of Kenyan athletes attending University did not participate in sports while in primary school, but that their participation began while in secondary school. Studies show that Kenyan children and youth have a high interest in sports and that they need more training to improve their talents. The main hindrances to participation were physiological factors and time or opportunity restrictions. Talent identification and development structures are needed.
Overweight, Obesity, and Stunting	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kenyan children in urban settings appear to be showing signs of the nutrition and physical activity transition while others are showing signs of stunting and wasting. 7% of boys and 17% girls in urban Kenya are overweight or obese. Urban Kenyan children are more sedentary, rely less on active transportation, and accrue fewer daily step counts than their rural counterparts. Overall, studies suggest that children in urban Kenya are being exposed to a more “obesogenic” lifestyle. There is however no nationally-representative data on childhood obesity and overweight in Kenya.

Indicator	Grade	Summary
Physical Activity in Schools Physical Education Sports	INS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is insufficient evidence on physical activity trends and practices in the school environment; however, anecdotal accounts reveal that physical education is scheduled within the school program as required by government policy, but that physical education sessions may in some cases be used to teach other examinable subjects.
Family	INS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is insufficient evidence on familial influence and household related physical activity.
Policy	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are existing government policies on participation in physical education by Kenyan school children, however, compliance is variable. All graduates of teachers training colleges are required to take physical education as a compulsory subject. There are no national physical activity and sedentary behaviour guidelines for Kenyan children and youth.

The Grading System

The assigning of grades was based on comprehensive analyses of available data sources on Kenyan children since 1986 (25 years). The sources included peer-reviewed journal publications, presentations at peer-attended forums, unpublished graduate student theses, and data from other organizations and agencies such as the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and the KIDS-CAN Research Alliance. A panel of experts discussed and assigned grades based on a set of specific criteria and existing grading schemes from similar report cards in Canada, South Africa, and the United States of America.

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