

Physical activity patterns - Children and young people in England

General trends

The Health Survey for England (HSE) 2008 provides self-report data for 7,521 children between the ages of 2 and 15. For children aged 2-10 years, a parental proxy report was used. The findings from the 2008 survey were based on the 2004 physical activity guidelines, set out in the *At least five a week report*. This recommended children and young people achieve at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity each day. The HSE findings revealed:

- 32% of boys and 24% of girls aged 2-15 years met the recommendations.
- The proportion of girls meeting the recommendations ranged from 35% of girls aged 2 years to 12% of those aged 14 years.
- The proportion of boys meeting the recommendations ranged from 43% of boys aged 2 years to 27% of those aged 13 years.
- In the week prior to the survey, more girls than boys participated in walking (65% and 61%, respectively).
- Boys were more likely than girls to have participated in informal activities (90% and 86% respectively) and formal sports (49% and 38%, respectively).

Accelerometry was used on a sample of 770 children to objectively measure physical activity over a seven day period. Overall, this data revealed similar findings to the self-report data:

- More boys than girls were classified as meeting the government's recommendations for physical activity (33% and 21%, respectively).
- 51% of boys aged 4-10 years met the government recommendations.
- 7% of boys aged 11-15 years met the recommendations.
- 34% of girls aged 4-10 years met the recommendations.
- Less than 1% of girls aged 11-15 years met the recommendations.

Travel to school

The 2011 National Travel Survey presents information on personal travel, including travel to school, in Great Britain. The survey collected data from nearly 8,000 households, covering over 18,000 individuals. It found:

- In 2011, 49% of trips to and from school by primary school children (aged 5-10) were made on foot.
- This was slightly lower than in 1995/97 when 53% of trips by primary school children were made on foot.



- Among secondary school children (aged 11-16) in 2011, 38% of school trips were on foot.
- This was slightly lower than in 1995/97 when 42% of trips by secondary school children were made on foot.
- 3% of school trips by secondary school children were by bicycle.
- For trips to school less than 1 mile in length, walking was the most prevalent mode of travel for both primary and secondary school children, accounting for 84% and 89% of trips respectively.

Other types of physical activity

The Taking Part Survey 2010/11 provides self-report information on the top 10 sporting activities participated in by children in England aged 5-15 years. For children aged 5-10 years, parents were asked to answer on their behalf. The survey found:

- For children aged 5-10 years the most popular sporting activities participated in outside of school hours in the past four weeks were swimming, diving or lifesaving (48%) followed by football (36%) and cycling (28%).
- For children aged 11-15 years the most popular sporting activities taken part in during the past four weeks both in and out of school were football (50%), basketball (27%) and swimming, diving or lifesaving (27%).
- In 2011, almost a third (30%) of 11-15 year olds belonged to a sports club, making this the most common means of doing competitive sport outside school. Over a fifth (23%) played for a sports team.

Provision of PE and sport in schools

The PE and Sport survey 2009/10 provides information from partnership schools (schools which typically comprise a specialist sports college linked to a set of secondary and primary schools) on the proportion of pupils receiving two hours of curriculum PE and the proportion of pupils participating in at least three hours of PE and school sport in a typical week. The survey found that:

- Across Years 1-13, 55% of pupils participated in at least three hours of PE and out of hours school sport during the 2009/10 academic year.
- Those in rural areas were more likely to participate in at least three hours of PE and school sport than those in urban areas (60% v. 54%).

With looking at just curriculum time PE the survey found that:

- On average, pupils in secondary schools spent 107 minutes in curriculum PE, compared to 127 minutes in primary schools and 145 minutes in special schools.
- The proportion of pupils participating in 120 minutes or more of curriculum PE per week decreases as pupils get older.
- 95% of pupils in Year 4 and 90% of pupils in Year 7 participate in 120 minutes or more of curriculum PE per week. This compares to 66% of Year 10 pupils and 22% of students in Year 13.

The gender gap in participation in 120 minutes or more of curriculum time PE increases throughout the school years starting at Year 7:

- In Year 7, 89% of girls and 91% of boys participate in 120 minutes or more of curriculum time PE per week.
- This gap increases by five percentage points by Year 11, with 45% of girls and 50% of boys participating in 120 minutes or more of curriculum time PE per week.
- There is no gender difference in curriculum PE time between Years 1-6.

Sedentary behaviour

According to the Health Survey for England 2008 self-report data:

- Average total sedentary time was very similar for boys and girls aged 2-15 years on weekdays (3.4 hours each) and weekend days (4.1 hours and 4.2 hours respectively).
- Average sedentary time generally increased with age.
- At weekends, the proportion that were sedentary for six or more hours generally increased across all ages, ranging from 8% of boys and girls aged 2 years, to 40% of boys and 41% of girls aged 15 years.

Accelerometer data reported in the Health Survey for England 2008 found that:

- The majority of the waking day for most children in England was spent in sedentary time (approx. 7.5 hours) or light intensity physical activity (around 4.2 hours).
- The average time spent in sedentary pursuits increased with age for both girls and boys.
- Boys aged 4-7 years spent on average 374 minutes per day in sedentary pursuits compared to those aged 12-15 years who spent 484 minutes.
- Among girls, there was an increase from 398 minutes per day at 4-7 years to 534 minutes at age 12-15 years.

References

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