

## New guidelines for physical activity

Current research indicates that almost one in five children are overweight or obese. In response to this growing concern, the Australian Government has recently released *Australia's physical activity recommendations for children and young people*. These recommendations have been developed by an expert reference group of researchers, policy makers and community organisation representatives from around the country.

Schools are important settings for education about physical activity as part of a healthy lifestyle. Teaching about the importance of a healthy lifestyle takes place in the key learning area of PDHPE. The PDHPE syllabus provides a framework and context for the study of lifestyle issues such as healthy eating habits and physical activity.

Whilst there is no mandated time for PDHPE or other key learning areas in primary schools, it is recommended that 120 minutes is dedicated to planned physical activity each week (Memorandum 98/263). This is inclusive of school sport in Years 3 to 6.

Two of the major focus areas in schools should be on developing student proficiency in fundamental movement skills and providing quality physical activity experiences for students, including increasing opportunities for students to play and be active.

### What are the recommendations?

Previously there had only been physical activity guidelines for adults. This is the first time recommendations have been put forward for children and young people.

There are two major recommendations.

1. *Children and young people should participate in at least 60 minutes (and up to several hours) of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity every day.*

Experts suggest there is a need to increase the amount of physical activity that young people undertake each day. Children who participate in quality physical education programs, in which they develop fundamental movement skills and play a variety of organised and non-organised activities, are more likely to be physically active throughout their life. Children should be encouraged to accumulate their physical activity time through varied activities and at various times of the day. The message of being active outside of school hours,

particularly in the time immediately after school, needs to be reinforced to children, parents and the community.

2. *Children and young people should not spend more than two hours a day using electronic media for entertainment (e.g. TV, computer games, Internet), particularly during daylight hours.*

We all know that children enjoy small screen activities, surfing the Internet and watching television. Whilst some of these activities may be educational, they often involve long periods of inactivity. Watching television for more than two hours a day during childhood and adolescence is associated with poor fitness, smoking, raised cholesterol and being overweight as an adult (Trost, 2003; Hancox et al., 2004). Ideally, children should be encouraged to find a balance between their active and inactive times.

### What do the guidelines mean by moderate intensity activity?

Moderate intensity physical activity is equivalent to a brisk walking pace, riding a bike or playing small space activities, such as handball.

There are many activities of moderate intensity that teachers often have in their repertoire of physical activity games. An example of this is *tail grab*, a simple game that can be played with the whole class. Ask all but one student to tuck a braid (tail) into the back of their shorts or pocket. Students move around the designated playing area. The student without a tail attempts to take another student's tail to keep as their own. The new, tailless student attempts to gain a tail. Players are not allowed to protect their tail by holding it.

### What do the guidelines mean by vigorous intensity activity?

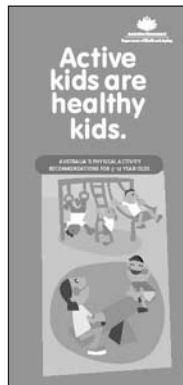
Vigorous intensity physical activity exceeds a brisk walking pace. It involves moving different body parts in a range of movement patterns, such as running, jumping, climbing, dancing and skipping. Vigorous intensity physical activity makes you 'huff and puff' and develop a light sweat.

Simple vigorous games are a great way to get students huffing and puffing. *Chain tag* is a vigorous game that can be played with the whole class. Ask students to scatter within a confined area. Select one student to be the chaser. The chaser attempts to tag someone. Each new person who is tagged joins hands to form a chain. Only the lead student is allowed to tag others. If the

chain breaks, no one can be tagged until the chain is reformed.

### How can I find out more information about the guidelines?

Schools will receive an information kit from the Australian Government's Department of Health and Ageing. The kit will include a sample of brochures and posters available for schools to distribute to their school community. Details of how to order the free brochures will be included with the information package. The *Active kids are healthy kids* brochures provide background information for parents and carers on the benefits of being active during out of school hours, and ideas for families to be more physically active during their leisure time.



### What can schools do?

The recommendations reinforce what many schools are doing in promoting physical activity. When the information kits and resources arrive at your school, it may be timely to revisit the emphasis on physical activity in the school. Some suggestions include:

- ensuring that teachers have a copy of the recommendations and access to the accompanying resources
- promoting the recommendations within the school and the community by putting up the posters, distributing the brochures, informing the P&C and key parent groups
- incorporating physical activity opportunities during the school day, e.g. providing equipment at recess and lunch time (see article entitled *Active playgrounds-it's more than just good fun!*)
- making connections between PDHPE and other key learning areas, such as movement activities within dance and drama
- looking for opportunities to get students moving and active across other key learning areas not just in PDHPE
- promoting the message that the 60 minutes of physical activity does not have to be continuous and can be accumulated throughout the whole day, e.g. in 10 minute bouts between class activities or after an assembly
- introducing energisers throughout the day, e.g. short energetic activities that get students moving.

### What can the school community do?

Schools are just one part of the physical activity jigsaw. Parents, community groups and clubs are also key pieces. Schools can encourage their school community to:

- be role models in participating in physical activities. Parents could be encouraged to walk with their children to and from school each day
- support daily physical activity for their children in various ways during non-school time. This could include walking and cycling as a means of transport, creative play and games. A focus should be on getting children active in the time period after school
- limit the amount of time children spend watching television, DVDs and playing computer games
- participate in active pursuits as a whole family. This may include activities such as playing with a ball in the local park or cycling around the local bicycle track
- help develop links between your school and community groups. If there is an after school care centre located at your school, provide them with some ideas as to the types of games students like to play at school. Perhaps equipment could be shared between your school and the care facility
- encourage the use of school facilities by local groups after school. This could include dance or gymnastics groups. Students may be motivated to attend these activities if they are based at their own school.

### Where can I go for more information and resources?

1. The *Curriculum K–12 Directorate* PDHPE web site is located at <http://www.curriculumsupport.nsw.edu.au/primary/index.cfm?kla=PDHPE>

This web site contains teaching ideas and support for teachers in a range of PDHPE curriculum related areas including physical activity, fundamental movement skills and nutrition.



2. The Australian Government's Department of Health and Ageing web site, *Building a healthy, active Australia* is located at <http://www.healthyactive.gov.au>

It provides practical information and up-dates, news for families, parents, teenagers, children and their carers on healthy eating, regular physical activity and active living. It also includes *Australia's physical activity recommendations for children and young people*, including copies of the brochures available for downloading.