

# Sports participation does not guarantee that children get enough physical activity

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Only about one-fourth of children participating in organized sports—such as baseball, softball or soccer—receive the government-recommended amount of physical activity during team practices, according to a report posted online today that will appear in the April 2011 print issue of *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*.

National guidelines recommend that children and teens perform 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous [physical activity](#) each day, but fewer than half of children and 10 percent of teens meet these guidelines, according to background information in the article. "The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends youth sports as a means of obtaining physical activity as well as social benefits," the authors write, and an estimated 44 million American youth participate in an organized sports program. "Although intensity values in the moderate to vigorous range are obtained while playing common youth sports, it is not clear how much physical activity is provided by youth sports practices, as much of the time may be inactive, such as receiving verbal instruction and waiting for turns."

Desiree Leek, B.S., of San Diego State University/University of California, San Diego, and colleagues documented physical activity among 200 youth age 7 to 14 who played on 29 soccer, baseball or softball teams. Participating athletes wore accelerometers—sensors that measure physical activity—around their waists during practices. Parents filled out surveys with information about demographics of the family as well as details about the children's age, racial/ethnic background, height

and weight.

Overall, 24 percent of participants met the 60-minute physical activity recommendation during practice. Rates differed by sport and age group. Fewer than 10 percent of participants age 11 to 14 years and fewer than 2 percent of girl softball players reached the guideline.

The lengths of the practices ranged from 40 to 130 minutes for soccer and 35 to 217 minutes for baseball/softball. Participating youth were moderately to vigorously active for 45.1 minutes, 46.1 percent of the practice time. Soccer players were active for an average of 13.7 more minutes and 10.6 percent more of practice time than baseball or softball players. Boys were active 10.7 more minutes and 7.8 percent more of practice time than girls. Younger athletes (age 7 to 10) spent 7 more minutes and 5.8 percent more of practice time in moderate to vigorous physical activity than those age 11 to 14.

The youth sports players spent an average of 30 minutes being inactive during each practice, the authors note. "Thus, there clearly are opportunities to increase physical activity in youth sports," they write. "Based on current findings, it appears that youth sports practices are making a less-than-optimal contribution to the public health goals of increasing physical activity and preventing childhood obesity."

"The health effects of youth sports could be improved by adopting policies and practices that ensure youth obtain sufficient physical activity during practices: emphasizing participation over competition, sponsoring teams for all skill levels across all ages, ensuring access by lower-income youth with sliding scales for fees, increasing practice frequency, extending short seasons, using pedometers or accelerometers to monitor physical activity periodically during practices, providing coaches strategies to increase physical activity and supporting youth and parents in obtaining adequate physical activity on non-practice days."

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