

Low influence of playgrounds on child activity: study

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Upgrading playgrounds does not appear to be sufficient to help children become more active.

Ongoing postdoctoral research by Dr Robin Quigg of the University of Otago's Department of Preventive and Social Medicine's Cancer Society Social and Behavioural Research Unit has come up with this result to date.

Dr Quigg looked at [physical activity](#) levels among 184 children of primary school age before and after two [playgrounds](#) in their neighbourhoods were upgraded by the Dunedin City Council.

Each child wore an accelerometer and a GPS device for eight days in 2008, then again a year later following the playground upgrades. However, when their results were compared to a control group of children living in an area where there was no playground upgrade, there was no significant difference in their total daily physical activity measured by the accelerometer.

Dr Quigg says the results suggest that playgrounds are a small aspect of children's daily life.

"It contradicts the way we think about playgrounds," she says.

"We tend to think that kids are always there, but really they are not. There are a lot of other things children do, and perhaps these may have

more impact on activity levels. So where are the hot spots in the city? Where are children going if not to the playground?”

Further study should be able to answer some of these questions, with more analysis of the data planned.

As well as further analysis of the GPS data, which will indicate where the children were located, the researchers also have information about the children, their homes, their socioeconomic status and their families.

Dr Quigg hopes to find out what it is that influenced the more active [children](#) in the group to be active.

“It could be that we discover all you need is another adult in the house which means someone could go outside to play or walk, or maybe it comes down to transport issues,” she says.

But she insists that despite the underwhelming results for playground upgrades, money should still be spent on them.

“Playground upgrades are a low key, positive approach to physical activity. They are also focal point of community, so it is important they are well maintained. In order to have an impact on child activity levels, greater promotion of playground opportunities may also be required.”

Different phases of this research have so far been published in the journal *Preventive Medicine* in 2010, and in the *Journal of Urban Health* in October 2011, with more results expected over the next two years.

Provided by University of Otago

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