

Adolescents with frequent PE more informed about physical activity's role in health

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Frequent, long-term instruction in physical education not only helps adolescents be more fit but also equips them with knowledge about how regular physical activity relates to good health, research at Oregon State University shows.

The findings are important for several reasons. One is that regular physical [education](#), which is on the decline nationwide, strongly correlated with students meeting the federal recommendation of at least 60 minutes per day of moderate to [vigorous physical activity](#).

The results also showed more than one adolescent in five reported no physical education at all; nearly 40 percent of the students in the 459-person sample, whose ages ranged from 12 to 15, were obese or overweight; and only 26.8 percent met the federal government's [physical activity guidelines](#).

"Perhaps some were not meeting the guidelines because fewer than 35 percent actually knew what the guidelines were for their age group," said study co-author Brad Cardinal, a professor in OSU's School of Biological and Population Health Sciences and a nationally recognized expert on the benefits of exercise.

The guidelines call for an hour or more of physical activity at least five days a week.

The findings by OSU's College of Public Health and Human Sciences

indicate that a trend of decline in physical education mandates for middle-school students is detrimental to developing the knowledge, interests and skills that serve as a foundation for a lifelong healthy lifestyle.

Physical activity also has been shown to improve cognitive function and academic performance, Cardinal said.

"We have the physical activity guidelines for a reason, and they're based on good science," he said. "With only slightly more than one in four adolescents meeting the guidelines, today's youth are being shortchanged in terms of their holistic development. They are not being prepared to live the proverbial good life."

Cardinal notes that new guidelines will be released in 2018.

"Because of a growing propensity toward inactivity in daily life, such as increased media consumption and screen time, the guidelines very well may have to be ratcheted up to compensate," Cardinal said.

Like physical education, participation in sports also correlated with more accurate [student](#) perceptions of the amount of [physical activity](#) necessary for [good health](#), as well as better performance on a variety of muscular fitness-related tests.

"This underscores the importance of quality physical education in schools and the added value of sports participation," Cardinal said. "The junior high/middle school years are a vulnerable and pivotal time in which students are typically required to take at least some physical education for at least part of the year, whereas after their freshman year in high school, most students aren't required to take any. It's a time when experiences in physical education and sports, whether positive or negative, can make or break whether an adolescent chooses to continue a

physically active lifestyle."

Cardinal points out that in Oregon, 2017 is supposed to represent the final year in a decade-long, statute-mandated ramp-up of physical education in public schools, but the reality is something different.

Portland Public Schools, he noted, just announced a cutback to 30 minutes of physical education every other week, whereas the law calls for 225 minutes per week for middle school students and 150 for elementary [school](#) students.

"In the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, physical education is a core subject, on par with language, math and science. Its status was elevated for a reason," Cardinal said. "If you're physically active, you're going to be healthier and stronger and have fewer behavioral problems, and your cognitive function is going to be better.

"Physical education trumps sports in a head-to-head comparison of the two," he added, "and when you have [physical education](#) plus sports, that's when you have students who are the healthiest, fittest, strongest and most active."

Findings were published in the *American Journal of Health Promotion*.

More information: Paul D. Loprinzi et al, Physical Education and Sport, *American Journal of Health Promotion* (2017). [DOI: 10.1177/0890117117698088](#)

Provided by Oregon State University

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