

Two thirds of young children do not do enough physical activity

April 6 2018



Credit: University of Western Australia

The largest global study to examine physical activity in children aged between two and five years old has found 66 per cent of children are not getting the nationally recommended three hours of daily physical activity needed for their growth and development.

The PLAYCE study, led by The University of Western Australia and made possible by funding from Healthway and the Heart Foundation, tracked the [physical activity](#) of 1600 [children](#) from more than 100 Perth early [childhood education](#) and care services over the past two years. The researchers attached [activity](#) monitoring belts to the children and tracked their activity throughout the day over the course of a week.

UWA lead researcher Associate Professor Hayley Christian said the findings indicated the average daily physical activity on care and non-care days combined was 150 minutes in toddlers and 174 minutes in preschoolers. In comparison, over an 8-hour day at early childhood education and care the activity was only 123 minutes for toddlers and 139 minutes for preschoolers.

"It is concerning that so many young children are falling short of meeting national physical activity guidelines," Dr. Christian said.

"Physical activity is not only important for a child's physical development and fitness, it is important for their brain development and mental health, and helps them to develop socially and emotionally.

"It is about having fun – moving and playing every day. This includes fast-paced activities like riding bikes, dancing and playing hide and seek, as well as slower paced activities such as making and playing in cubby houses, dress ups and water play."

Associate Professor Christian said the study also found only 16 per cent of early childhood education and care services had a written physical activity policy in place.

In general, larger centres had bigger outdoor play areas and more free running space for children to be physically active.

Environmental factors also contributed, with most centres having a wide range of outdoor play equipment but little indoor play equipment for active play. Indoor areas are important for play, especially on days of bad weather. More natural features in centre outdoor areas such as trees, shrubs and edible gardens are also important for active play.

Dr. Christian said with it common now for both parents to work and

more children spending time in care, early childhood education and care services played an important role in supporting the physical development and health of children. The team are currently working with the early childhood education and care sector to trial professional development programs that will create more physical activity opportunities for children attending care.

"However it's important to understand that we all play a role in children's health and physical [development](#). It's important for parents, educators, [early childhood education](#) and care providers and researchers to work together to ensure we provide our young people with the best possible start to life."

More information: Hayley Christian et al. Influence of the day care, home and neighbourhood environment on young children's physical activity and health: protocol for the PLAYCE observational study, *BMJ Open* (2016). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2016-014058](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2016-014058)

Provided by University of Western Australia

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