

'Make physical activity part of children's routine' during lockdown

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Parents and carers should ensure that physical activity is part of the routine for children and families during the COVID-19 lockdown, according to an international study involving the University of

Strathclyde.

The study, detailed in a comment article published in *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, covers 15 nations. It found that time spent in places such as parks, beaches and community gardens reduced by nearly a third between the week ending 23 February—before the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a COVID-19 pandemic—and the week ending 5 April.

Travel by [public transport](#) was down by more than half—59% - over the same period.

While these and other restrictions are in keeping with the global effort to halt the spread of COVID-19, the researchers found that they were having the effect of reducing still further what were often already low levels of [physical activity](#) in [children](#).

The researchers make a number of recommendations to families, health professionals, teachers and policy-makers on promoting healthy activity, including:

- taking the opportunity to go outdoors, while observing distancing regulations
- incorporating physical activity into children's [daily routines](#)—supported by use of electronic media—and breaking up extended sedentary periods every 30 to 60 minutes; families should also be encouraged to join in while observing distancing regulations
- keeping children's bedtime and rising time consistent, keeping screens out of the rooms where they sleep and avoiding screen use before bedtime
- [health professionals](#) recommending current guidelines to parents, family members and caregivers

- promotion by governments of healthy movement behaviours in children as part of response strategies and public messages
- regular media messages promoting physical activity

Children advocating for their right to a healthy, active life within the COVID-19 restrictions.

Professor John Reilly, of Strathclyde's School of Psychological Sciences & Health, is the sole UK participant in the study.

He said: "The measures against COVID-19 are in place for a very good reason but this reduction in physical activity could be seen as an unintended consequence. Even before the lockdown measures, it was a major problem; our previous research has found that, in Scotland alone, fewer than 20% of children were meeting physical activity guidelines.

"It's important that people make whatever use of their environment they can and take the opportunities they can to keep physical activity going. The vast majority of children have access to outdoor spaces they can still use.

"While we have been fortunate with the weather during lockdown, even screen time can also incorporate activity resources, such as online fitness sessions. Breaks in screen time are also important but one reason physical activity is most needed just now is that school is the place where children most often have it.

"We have found that they are much less active on the non-school days of weekends and holidays; our concern is that they are missing out not only in education but also in activity."

More information: *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, [DOI: 10.1016/52352-4642\(20\)30131-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(20)30131-0) , [www.thelancet.com/journals/lan ...](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lan...)

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