

Global recommendations released to reduce sedentary time at school

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An international report with recommendations designed to counteract school-related sedentary behavior in children and youth, exacerbated by COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, has been released by the Sedentary

Behavior Research Network (SBRN), in partnership with the University of Prince Edward Island and the CHEO Research Institute.

The report, "International School-Related Sedentary Behavior Recommendations for Children and Youth," is a world first and aspires to inform and guide students, educators, [school administrators](#), policymakers, parent and guardians, caregivers, physicians, and other healthcare providers in the promotion of student health and wellness.

"High levels of sedentary behavior, especially screen time, are associated with negative health and academic outcomes for [school-aged children](#) and youth," said Dr. Travis Saunders, lead author of the new recommendations and associate professor of applied human sciences at the University of Prince Edward Island. "Given that the school day is largely sedentary and with screen time taking on an increasingly important role for many students since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, these new evidence-based recommendations are timely and provide globally applicable guidance for managing sedentary behaviors performed during the school day or as homework."

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began two years ago, children and youth across Canada and around the world have spent unprecedented time sedentary in front of digital screens for school and recreation purposes. Sedentary behaviors are activities done while awake that involve low-energy expenditure while sitting or lying down. The World Health Organization and many countries, including Canada, have developed guidelines for minimizing the health impacts of sedentary behavior; however, these recommendations focus on overall sedentary behavior and recreational screen time. To date, there have not been any evidence-based recommendations specifically related to sedentary behaviors performed during the school day or as homework.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, most children were not meeting

public health guidelines for sedentary behaviors and recreational screen time, noted Dr. Saunders.

SBRN convened an international panel of experts to prepare draft recommendations and consulted 148 stakeholders from 23 countries to produce the final recommendations that are listed below. Full details of the recommendation development process were [published](#) on April 5, 2022, in the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*. The recommendations have already been translated into Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, French, German, Inuktitut, Nepalese, Norwegian, Portuguese, Russian, Slovenian, Spanish, Swahili, and Vietnamese, all of which are available on the SBRN website.

SBRN Recommendations:

A healthy school day includes:

- Breaking up periods of extended sedentary behavior with both scheduled and unscheduled movement breaks
 - at least once every 30 minutes for ages 5 to 11 years
 - at least once every hour for ages 12 to 18 years
 - consider a variety of intensities and durations (e.g., standing, stretching breaks, moving to another classroom, active lessons, active breaks).
- Incorporating different types of movement (e.g., light activities that require movement of any body parts, and moderate to vigorous activities that require greater physical effort) into homework whenever possible, and limiting sedentary homework to no more than 10 minutes per day, per grade level. For example, in Canada this means typically no more than 10 minutes per day in grade 1, or 60 minutes per day in grade 6.
- Regardless of the location, school-related screen time should be meaningful, mentally or physically active, and serve a specific

pedagogical purpose that enhances learning compared to alternative methods. When school-related screen time is warranted,

- limit time on devices, especially for students 5 to 11 years of age;
- take a device break at least once every 30 minutes;
- discourage media-multitasking in the classroom and while doing homework;
- avoid screen-based homework within an hour of bedtime.
- Replacing sedentary learning activities with movement-based learning activities (including standing) and replacing screen-based learning activities with non-screen-based learning activities (e.g., outdoor lessons) can further support students' health and wellbeing.

"The goal of these recommendations is to help maximize the benefits and minimize the harms of school-related sedentary behaviors," said Dr. Mark Tremblay, Chair of SBRN, Senior Scientist at the CHEO Research Institute, and Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Ottawa. "In 2020, the ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth gave Canadian children and youth a D+ grade for sedentary behaviors, and during the pandemic, the grade has plummeted further. These new recommendations will help schools be part of the solution."

"We hope these recommendations help principals, teachers, parents, and students to contain unnecessary sedentary behavior and [screen time](#)," added Melanie Davis, Executive Director of Physical and Health Education Canada and a contributor to the recommendations. "We all need to work together to recalibrate the healthy movement behaviors of children and youth."

More information: Travis J. Saunders et al, International school-

related sedentary behaviour recommendations for children and youth, *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* (2022). [DOI: 10.1186/s12966-022-01259-3](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-022-01259-3)

Nicholas Kuzik et al, School-related sedentary behaviours and indicators of health and well-being among children and youth: a systematic review, *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* (2022). [DOI: 10.1186/s12966-022-01258-4](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-022-01258-4)

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