

Hype up fitness to support kids' health post-lockdowns

April 28 2022



When COVID-19 hit, outdoor playgrounds closed, and for many months, outdoor exercise was limited to only one hour per day. Credit: Unsplash/Shiau Ling

As COVID-19 reaches record levels in the UK, health experts are calling

for a focus on children's physical fitness as new research reveals concerning changes to children's health and physical fitness following the pandemic.

Conducted by Newcastle University (UK), the University of South Australia, Edinburgh Napier University and Murdoch University, the study assessed one-year changes in children's physical fitness and health-related quality of life and body mass index (BMI), after the 2020 COVID-19 UK lockdowns.

Researchers found that for children 8-10 years old:

- 51 percent of children were classed as 'unfit' (compared with 35 percent at baseline)
- 47 percent of children were overweight or obese (compared with 33 percent at baseline)
- Children's [body mass](#) increased by an average of 6.8 kg, about twice the amount expected in this time period.

UniSA researcher, Dr. Naomi Burn says the study highlights the vital importance of [physical fitness](#) for children's health and well-being, post-pandemic.

"Physical fitness is incredibly important for children of all ages, with fitness linked to a range of health outcomes, including heart and skeletal health, body composition, and mental well-being," Dr. Burn says.

"When COVID-19 hit the United Kingdom in 2020, infection control measures led to the closure of schools for most pupils; outdoor playgrounds and [sports clubs](#) closed, and for many months outdoor exercise was limited to only one hour per day.

"Such unprecedented restrictions have had a distinct impact on children's

physical and [mental health](#), with nearly half of children presenting as being obese and more than half classified as unfit.

"While the pandemic persists, we need to recognize the need to keep kids healthy and active. Not only will this benefit them now, but also later in life.

"Right now, we need governments, schools and communities to establish programs and policies that can support involvement in sports and physical activities. This is vital for [children](#)'s health recovery both post lockdown and in the case of future restrictions."

More information: Laura Basterfield et al, Changes in children's physical fitness, BMI and health-related quality of life after the first 2020 COVID-19 lockdown in England: A longitudinal study, *Journal of Sports Sciences* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/02640414.2022.2047504](https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2022.2047504)

Provided by University of South Australia

Citation: Hype up fitness to support kids' health post-lockdowns (2022, April 28) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-04-hype-kids-health-post-lockdowns.html>

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