

Promoting healthy movement behaviors in children under five in Europe

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	1. Adopt/adapt	Adopt/adapt WHO 2019 guidelines at national level.
	2. Start	Start public health surveillance if this is absent at present.
	3. Improve	Improve public health surveillance if existing surveillance is limited.
	4. Educate	Educate stakeholders about the guidelines - families, health professionals, policymakers in health and education.
	5. Form	Form policy for the movement behaviour guidelines in the under-5's - encompassing upstream elements.
	6. Identify	Identify ways of implementing policy, evaluate policy using surveillance and research.
	7. Use	Use existing implementation resources such as the WHO Ending Childhood Obesity Implementation Plan; WHO Standards for Healthy Eating, Physical Activity, Sedentary Behaviour and Sleep for Early Childhood Education and Care Settings.

Practical steps needed to achieve impact of the WHO 2019 movement behavior guidelines for the under-5's across Europe from 2024 to 2029. Credit: *The Lancet Regional Health - Europe* (2024). DOI: 10.1016/j.lanepe.2024.100869

The SUNRISE European Study Group, led by experts in physical activity and children's health, is urgently appealing to countries across Europe to take specific measures to promote healthy movement behaviors in children aged under five years.

Under the leadership of Jesús del Pozo, an expert in the Epidemiology of Physical Activity and (children's) health and leader of the EPAFit (Epidemiology of Physical Activity and Fitness Across Lifespan) Research Group at the University of Seville and the leader of the SUNRISE study in Spain, specific actions are being taken to tackle this public health crisis.

The World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines for "24-hour movement behaviors" ([physical activity](#) (PA), sedentary behavior (SB), including [screen time](#) and sleep) in children aged under five were published in April 2019. The guidelines were developed as a response to the [childhood obesity](#) pandemic to help ensure that children under five engage in healthy levels of physical activity, screen time, and sleep.

The review and synthesis of the evidence showed that these behaviors influenced a wide range of other outcomes (cognitive, social, and [emotional development](#); [language development](#); cardiometabolic health; bone and skeletal health; motor development; physical fitness, growth, and well-being), and had substantial short- and long-term consequences.

Five years on, it is now time to review whether key steps have been taken in response to these guidelines across Europe and to explore ways to increase the impact of the WHO Guidelines across Europe over the next five years. The members of the SUNRISE group have [published](#) a paper in *The Lancet Regional Health - Europe* in which they set out their conclusions and recommendations.

The researchers acknowledge that the development of physical activity

policies for school-aged children and adolescents is reasonably good across Europe, and many countries in the SUNRISE Study Group have already set physical activity guidelines for children aged under five years.

However, it is stressed that policy development in this field is inadequate and should be extended to cover sedentary behavior, including screen time and sleep. Moreover, emphasis is placed on the need for adequate policy implementation and assessment, which are often lacking.

According to experts, policy implementation must address "bottom-up" influences on movement behaviors in recognition that they are strongly influenced by the wider environment, including the physical, built, sociocultural, and political environment. It is especially crucial to address [early childhood education](#) and care settings, since they are central to developing healthy movement behaviors in children aged under five years.

The researchers insist that effective policies targeting upstream [environmental influences](#) are required to change movement behaviors among European populations equitably. The SUNRISE Study Group urges European countries to take specific actions and work together to secure a healthier and more prosperous future for children across Europe.

More information: Marieke De Craemer et al, Practical steps needed to achieve impact of the WHO 2019 movement behaviour guidelines for children under the age of 5: the SUNRISE Study Europe Group evaluation, *The Lancet Regional Health - Europe* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.lanepe.2024.100869](#)

Provided by University of Seville

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