

PRESS RELEASE

New NICE public health guidance on promoting physical activity for children

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) will tomorrow (28 January 2009) issue guidance on promoting physical activity, active play and sport for all children and young people up to the age of 18 in family, pre-school, school and community settings.

Current national guidelines recommend that children and young people should do a minimum of 60 minutes of at least moderate-intensity physical activity each day. However, studies show that these levels are not being met. In a recent survey¹ only 45% of 15 year old girls and 68% of 15 year old boys questioned reached the recommended levels of activity.

Physical activity not only contributes to both physical and mental well being, it is essential for good health later in life. It can help prevent conditions and diseases including coronary heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers. Physical inactivity in England costs an estimated £8.2 billion each year - this includes the direct costs of treating diseases linked to lack of activity and the indirect costs caused through sickness absence.

Professor Mike Kelly, Public Health Excellence Centre Director, NICE said:

“Obesity rates in this country are rocketing and with the number of children not taking part in physical activity increasing, this problem can only get worse. Dealing with the long term consequences of obesity costs an estimated £2.5 billion each year, placing a huge strain on the health service. It’s important that we let children play, and don’t let society’s aversion to risk stop young people from being physically active.

“This guidance supports the updated Department of Health ‘Physical activity action plan’ published earlier this month, making strategic and practical recommendations to promote physical activity to children and young people in a variety of settings and so will help to ensure that this frightening trend is halted.”

The recommendations made in this guidance are not only for the NHS and local authorities, but for all those who have a role or responsibility for promoting physical activity for children and young people, from policy managers and planners to teachers as well as parents and carers. The recommendations include:

National policy

- Deliver a long-term (minimum 5 years) national campaign to promote physical activity among children and young people. The campaign should be integrated with, and support, other national health campaigns and strategies to increase participation in play and sport and reduce obesity.

High-level policy and strategy

- Ensure there is a coordinated local strategy to increase physical activity among children and young people, their families and carers. The strategy should help achieve local area agreement targets.

Local strategic planning

- Identify groups of local children and young people who are unlikely to participate in at least 1 hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity a day and involve these children and young people in the design, planning and delivery of physical activity opportunities.
- Ensure physical activity facilities are suitable for children and young people with different needs and their families, particularly those from lower socioeconomic groups, those from minority ethnic groups with specific cultural requirements and those who have a disability.

Local organisations: planning, delivery and training

- Consult with girls and young women to find out what type of physical activities they prefer. Actively involve them in the provision of a range of options in response. This may include formal and informal, competitive and non-competitive activities such as football, wheelchair basketball, dance, aerobics and the gym. Activities may be delivered in single and mixed-gender groups.

Local practitioners: delivery

- Groups and individuals who have regular contact with children, young people, their parents and carers should ensure parents and carers are aware of government advice that children and young people should undertake a minimum of 60 minutes moderate to vigorous physical activity a day.

Gareth Stratton, Professor of Paediatric Exercise Science, Research Institute for Sports and Exercise Sciences, Liverpool John Moores University and Chair of the Programme Development Group (PDG) said: “The best way to encourage children and young people to be physically active varies dependent on their age, culture and gender. With this in mind the guidance recommends regular consultation with different groups of children and young people and their families to find out what helps or prevents them from being physically active and what type of activities they enjoy. The information gathered should be used to plan dedicated programmes that tackle any inequalities in provision and increase opportunities to be active.”

Suzanne Priest, Dance Adviser and Advanced Skills Teacher in Dance, National Dance Teachers and member of the PDG said: “We know that physical activity is important for children’s healthy growth and development, but it is also associated with improvements in children and young people’s academic achievement and social skills. By putting these recommendations into practice, schools can demonstrate to parents and Ofsted that they take pupils’ physical and mental wellbeing seriously.”

Barry Causer, Active Travel Service Manager, Sutton and Merton PCT (on secondment from London Borough of Southwark, where he is Sport and Physical Activity Manager) and member of the PDG said: “The recommendations make specific reference to local children and young people’s plans, joint strategic needs assessments, local development and planning frameworks as well as sustainable community plans and strategies, ensuring that they explicitly address the need for children and young people to be physically active.”

Issy Cole-Hamilton, Head of Policy and Research, Play England at the National Children's Bureau, London and member of the PDG said: “With fewer places where children feel safe to play outside, and ever increasing traffic in residential areas, today’s children are becoming less and less active. By providing children and young people with spaces and staffed facilities where they feel safe to play freely with their friends, we are giving them the chance to be more physically active whilst enjoying the sense of freedom that this offers them.”

Sarah Vaughan-Roberts, Community Member and guideline developer said:

“The guidance highlights that a balance needs to be struck between protecting our children and allowing and encouraging them to be active. It is natural for parents or carers to be concerned about a child’s safety, but it is important for children to develop their risk awareness and an understanding of their own abilities as necessary life skills which they can achieve with access to environments that stimulate their need to explore and safely challenge them, such as adventure playgrounds.”

Ends

For more information call the NICE press office on 0845 003 7782.

Notes to Editors

About the guidance

1. Information on this guidance can be found on the NICE website at - www.nice.org.uk/PH17
2. The recommendations relate to all children and young people up to the age of 18, including those with a medical condition or disability. The guidance does not cover specialised services for children and young people with a disability. There is a specific focus on children aged 11 and under and girls aged 11 to 18.
3. Current guidelines recommend that children and young people should do a minimum of 60 minutes of at least moderate-intensity physical activity each day. At least twice a week, this should include activities to improve bone health (weight-bearing activities that produce high physical stresses on the bones, such as running and jumping), muscle strength and flexibility (DH 2004).

Moderate-intensity activity increases breathing and heart rates to a level where the pulse can be felt and the person feels warmer. It might make someone sweat on a hot or humid day (or when indoors). Vigorous activity results in being out of breath or sweating.

4. Some related guidance includes:
 - Promoting and creating built or natural environments that encourage and support physical activity. www.nice.org.uk/PH8.
 - Promoting children's social and emotional wellbeing in primary education. www.nice.org.uk/PH12
 - Obesity: guidance on the prevention, identification, assessment and management of overweight and obesity in adults and children www.nice.org.uk/CG43
 - Depression in children and young people: identification and management in primary, community and secondary care www.nice.org.uk/CG28

About NICE

5. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is the independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention and treatment of ill health.
6. NICE produces guidance in three areas of health:

- **public health** – guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention of ill health for those working in the NHS, local authorities and the wider public and voluntary sector
- **health technologies** – guidance on the use of new and existing medicines, treatments and procedures within the NHS
- **clinical practice** – guidance on the appropriate treatment and care of people with specific diseases and conditions within the NHS.

¹ The Information Centre (2008) Health survey for England 2006. Leeds: The Information Centre.