



Provincial Activity Guidelines for After-School Programs in Alberta

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Preamble

Many different organizations provide after-school care and/or after-school programs across Alberta, offering an important service to young people and their families during a critical time of the day. The goals and components of each program are influenced by the mandate of the organization, the funding sources, the resources available or a combination of the three. This document is a resource to support organizations in offering quality after-school programs that support Alberta's children and youth to be healthy and physically active. They also serve as a guide for continuous improvement, offering organizations an opportunity to collaboratively reflect on their practice, service delivery models and program design.

Through the adoption of these guidelines and recommendations, after-school providers should strive for children and youth accumulating at least **30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity during each day of the program** (1). Current physical activity guidelines state that children and youth should accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day for physical, social and academic benefits (2). Additionally, sedentary behaviour guidelines state that children and youth should limit recreational screen time to no more than 2 hours per day (2). For more on the importance of these guidelines see Appendix A.

Employing these guidelines will also support community, regional and provincial plans to increase the number of children and youth with access to after-school programming that provides physical activity.

The guidelines and strategies can apply to all types of after-school care programs, including those involving a mixture of enrichment and academic components and programs designed to engage participants in a specific type of recreation or sport. Throughout the guidelines there is an emphasis of striving for an accumulated **30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity**. In programs focused exclusively on academics or enrichment opportunities, energizers can be incorporated, when possible, to help reach an accumulated 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity. These guidelines can provide ideas for incorporating more physical activity throughout these more academic focused programs.

For assistance implementing the guidelines view the associated Implementation Guide, which will provide you with a step-by-step process for implementing the guidelines, as well as a set of self-assessment tools and resources that may be helpful along the way.

The Guidelines: A Summary

This document provides three key recommendations for offering quality after-school programs and a number of strategies for program managers and frontline program leaders that can be used to implement these recommendations. The three recommendations are to:

1. offer an after-school program that allows children and youth to accumulate at least 30 minutes of developmentally appropriate moderate to vigorous physical activity;
2. offer an after-school program that serves all children and youth including those most at risk of being inactive (e.g., girls, older youth, those with a disability and individuals with greater financial need); and
3. offer high quality programming that prioritizes collaboration and continuous improvement.

What is moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) and what does this look like in my after-school program?

MVPA, by definition is 4.0 to 7.0 times the intensity of rest. It includes active play and games/sports that raises children's heart rate and makes them "huff and puff". Some examples of MVPA to consider for your program include:

- Jump Rope/Double Dutch
- Frisbee
- Dancing
- Playground Play
- Obstacle Courses
- Swinging
- Running and Chasing Games

Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, 2016



After-School Activity Guidelines

Physical Activity Time, Intensity and Quality



Recommendation 1: Offer an after-school program that allows children and youth to accumulate at least 30 minutes of developmentally appropriate moderate to vigorous physical activity.



Strategies for Program Managers:

- Have a written policy stating that children and youth will accumulate at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity during your program (3).
- Ensure that staff have knowledge regarding concepts of light, moderate, and vigorous physical activity, bone and muscle strengthening and cardio respiratory fitness activities, as well as developmentally appropriate physical activities.



Strategies for Frontline Program Leaders:

- Schedule physical activity early in the program – this will ensure that those leaving early don't miss out on the opportunity to be active.
- Make time for child- or youth- initiated play that is physically active.
- Provide short physical activity breaks between or within your programs to reduce sedentary time.
- Make instructions brief to avoid excessive sedentary time.
- Offer a variety of fun physical activities during scheduled physical activity, allowing participants to choose the activity they enjoy most.
- Use a variety of play spaces, including natural play areas, indoor spaces, and outdoor spaces when possible.
- Use visual markings (if appropriate) to encourage physical activity and help ensure participants use the entire play area (4).



For activities suitable for all age ranges, abilities, spaces and equipment consider visiting activeforlife.ca/activities

After-School Activity Guidelines

Supportive Access, Facilities and Equipment



Recommendation 2: Offer an after-school program that serves all children and youth including those most at risk of being inactive (e.g., girls, older youth, those with a disability and individuals with greater financial need).



Strategies for Program Managers:

- Schedule your program at a time that is convenient for participants and parents.
- Locate your program in an area that is easily reached by walking, biking, or public transit.
- Provide transportation options to ensure that your program is accessible, consider active transportation (e.g., walking, cycling, etc.).
- Work with decision makers and facility owners on new or renovated indoor or outdoor facilities to ensure they accommodate opportunities for after-school physical activity (e.g., schools and recreation facilities).
- Have a facility agreement with the school board to provide access for after-school programs after the school day ends.
- Follow safety and security protocols for staffing.



Strategies for Frontline Program Leaders:

- Offer activities that are adaptable, accessible and inclusive of individuals of all abilities, cultures and religious beliefs.
- Collect information from girls and other children and youth at risk of being inactive on what would motivate them to be active.
- Have a variety of equipment available for all participants.
- Ensure participants are bringing appropriate clothing for winter activities.

After-School Activity Guidelines

Collaboration, Implementation and Evaluation



Recommendation 3: Offer high quality programming that prioritizes collaboration and continuous improvement.



Strategies for Program Managers:

- Communicate and cooperate with community networks of program providers and supporters to ensure access to high quality and quantity of after-school programs.
- Partner with a variety of community agencies who can provide human, financial and physical resources.
- Use skilled people in the school or community to assist with program delivery and training (e.g., physical education teachers, coaches, dance teachers, fitness instructors, outdoor leaders, etc.).
- Meet with the school physical education staff on an annual basis to learn about the physical education curriculum, status of physical literacy skills and how your program can complement what is taught in physical education.
- Integrate your after-school program into related school and community strategies such as health promoting schools, community health plans and municipal physical activity plans.
- Support staff on how to increase physical activity through training, coaching, mentoring and monitoring progress.
- Regularly ask participants, staff and parents about satisfaction and ideas for improvement (joint responsibility between managers and leaders).



Strategies for Frontline Program Leaders:

- Participate in at least two professional development sessions per year, supported by your Program Manager, on physical activity (e.g., workshops, orientation, web-based learning, mentors, discussion forms, etc.).
- Measure physical activity levels (e.g., using pedometers or observation) at least twice a year and make changes based on the results (5).
- Regularly ask participants, staff and parents about satisfaction and ideas for improvement (joint responsibility between managers and leaders).

Appendix A

The Importance of Physical Activity Guidelines



Evidence to support the importance of physical activity guidelines for after-school programming is highlighted below:

- It is well documented that children and youth in Canada are not getting enough physical activity on a daily basis (6). After-school programs can play a significant role in helping more children and youth achieve the national guidelines on physical activity. In Alberta, many already do (7):

36% of after-school programs offer 30 minutes or more of organized outdoor play every day	45% of after-school programs offer 30 minutes or more of organized indoor play every day
43% of after-school programs offer 30 minutes or more of free outdoor play every day	54% of after-school programs offer 30 minutes or more of free indoor play every day

- These guidelines stress the importance of 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per session because of the associated health benefits. However, most after-school programs are only providing 10 – 20 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per session (8). New research also describes the health benefits of light intensity physical activity such as walking (9).
- The evidence on the contribution of physical activity to academic performance continues to grow (10, 11). Studies have found benefits on cognitive functioning in children for both acute, short bouts of exercise and chronic, regular exercise (12).
- Having guidelines around girl-specific physical activity is important. It has been found that girls, aged 6-10 and 12-19 years engage in less physical activity than boys (13, 14).

- These guidelines highlight the importance of free play in outdoor and nature based settings. Playing outdoors is strongly associated with more physical activity. A growing body of evidence has found that children are spending less time outdoors despite the health, social, and environmental benefits of nature based play (15, 16). A recent Canadian study examined the relationship between the physical environment and physical activity of children aged 11 to 13 and concluded that the presence of undeveloped treed areas in the home neighbourhood predicted higher levels of physical activity (17). Further, recreation facilities, parks and playground space were not associated with physical activity for this age group.
- Program evaluation is an important component to assess physical activity levels of children and youth and is therefore included in the guidelines. Few after-school programs are measuring the impact of their program on the amount of physical activity children and youth are receiving.
- The Alberta Children Services Department offers accreditation to after-school and child care programs (for children up to the age of 12) and requires the promotion of physical wellness and the incorporation of physical literacy in everyday programming (18). These guidelines can help after-school and child care programs with their physical activity programming.

Integration of the Guidelines

After-school programs should be one component of a larger plan to integrate physical activity into daily life. A multi-level solution, delivered by schools, municipal government, youth serving organizations and others is required to integrate 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity into daily life including changes to individual skills, knowledge and attitudes as well as supportive and accessible physical and social environments (19). These include:

- the grade 1 to 9 Daily Activity Physical policy (20);
- quality daily physical education;
- class physical activity breaks to minimize sedentary time;
- walking and biking to and from school and other places;
- being active with families/guardians at home and in the community;
- having accessible sport and recreation programs and facilities in the community;
- having outdoor natural environments for outdoor play;

Appendix B



Resources

Research & Background Information:

- What's happening in after-school programs? Findings from an environment scan of after-school programs in Alberta:
https://www.centre4activeliving.ca/media/filer_public/8e/7e/8e7ec526-82db-41bd-b1e5-3253c0433ebe/2012-after-school-report.pdf
- Alberta Recreation and Parks Association After-School Recreation Initiatives Executive Summary 2009: <http://s3.arpaonline.ca/docs/AfterSchool-ReportExec-Sum.pdf>

Other Guidelines & Standards:

- Canadian 24 Hour Movement Guidelines for children and youth (5-17 years):
<http://www.csep.ca/CMFiles/Guidelines/24hrGlines/Canadian24HourMovementGuidelines2016.pdf>
- Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for children and youth:
<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/1c291796-4eb0-4073-be8e-bce2d331f9ce/resource/3319786c-1df1-43ca-8693-067f733682dc/download/nutrition-guidelines-ab-children-youth.pdf>
- Standards for healthy eating and physical activity in out of school time programs:
<http://naaweb.org/images/HEPASTandards8-4-11final.pdf>

Activity Examples:

- Playworks Game Library: <https://www.playworks.org/game-library/>
- After-School Energizers: Classroom-Based Physical Activities: <http://www.nchealthyschools.org/docs/energizers/afterschool.pdf>
- PlaySport: <http://www.playsport.net/>
- Green Schoolyards America: <http://www.greenschoolyards.org/guides/>
- Active for Life, Activity Bank: <http://activeforlife.com/activities/>

Acknowledgements

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Appendix C



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