

Child Physical Activity in Texas

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

TEXAS CHILDREN ARE NOT GETTING THE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY THEY NEED

Children and adolescents should engage in 60 or more minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) **every day** for optimal health and fitness.¹ You can talk but not sing during moderate activities, such as brisk walking and cycling; you cannot say more than a few words without pausing for a breath during vigorous activities, such as dancing, jogging, and playing football.

Physical Activity Shortfall



Only **23%** of Texas school-aged children were physically active 60+ minutes/day on all 7 days during the previous week.



The percentage of students who physically active 60 or more minutes on all 7 days varies by where students live.

- Community type
 - **21%** in large urban communities
 - **23%** in urban & suburban communities
 - **30%** in rural communities
- Texas/Mexico border
 - **22%** in border counties
 - **25%** in non-border counties

Opportunities outside of physical education classes in schools are not being fully utilized.



35% of children ages 6-12 play outdoors 3 or fewer days/week.



4% of elementary and **40%** of middle and high schools do not have classroom physical activity breaks.



52% of middle schools do not allow students to use gym facilities and equipment outside of school hours.

Why Physical Activity Matters

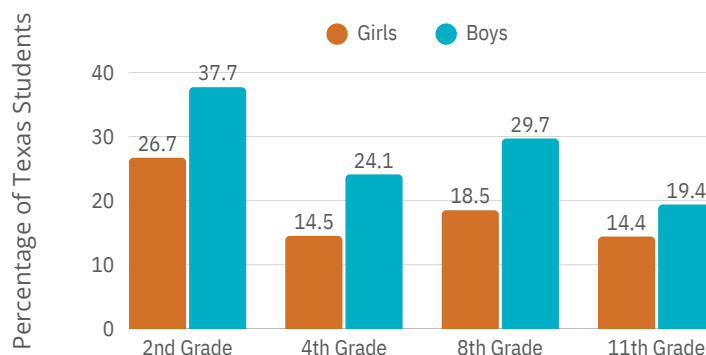
Health benefits of being physically active include:¹⁻²

- Improved heart and lung health
- Strengthened bones and muscles
- Maintenance of a healthy weight
- Improved mood and lower risk of depression
- Improved memory, attention, & mental processing speed
- Improved academic performance



Texas children and adolescents only meet these physical activity guidelines **4.3 days/week**. Girls meet **4.1 days/week** and boys meet **4.7 days/week**.

Students who are physically active 60+ minutes/day for 7 days/week



How to increase Texas children's physical activity

Suggested ways to engage children in physical activity throughout the day:

- Active commuting (walking, biking) to school or other destinations.³
- Participate in before- and after-school programs that include physical activity.³
- Structured PE classes using evidence-based programs.⁴
- Classroom physical activity breaks and recess.³
- Participate in team sports.³
- Encourage children to play outdoor.³

Parents should be role models and encourage children to be physically active by:

- Engaging in physical activity or active games with children, such as walking before and after meals and playing kickball.
- Providing activity breaks when doing sedentary activities with children, for example doing jumping jacks when watching TV or playing video games.
- Providing children with equipment for physical activity, for example bicycles and balls.

Current Physical Activity Guidelines

Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans (2nd edition) recommend:¹

- School-aged children and adolescents (6-17 years)
 - Engage in daily **60+ minutes** of moderate-to-vigorous physical activities that are age-appropriate and enjoyable, and offer variety, including:
 - **Aerobic:** Most of the 60+ minutes/day should be either moderate- or vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity and should include vigorous-intensity physical activity on at least 3 days/week.
 - **Muscle-strengthening & Bone-strengthening:** At least 3 days/week as part of the 60+ minutes/day physical activity.

Texas Education Code requires:⁵

- **Pre-K-Grade 5**
 - Participate in moderate or vigorous physical activity for at least 30 minutes daily throughout the school year through PE curriculum and/or structured activity during daily recess.
- **Grade 6-8**
 - Participate in moderate or vigorous physical activity daily for at least 30 minutes for at least four semesters as part of the district's PE curriculum.
- **High school**
 - Earn 1.0 PE credit to satisfy graduation requirements.

References

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2018). Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, 2nd edition.

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4. PE / Physical Activity. (n.d.). CATCH Global Foundation. Retrieved February 26, 2025, from <https://shop.catch.org/collections/pe-physical-activity>

5. Physical Education (PE) and Physical Activity (PA) Frequently Asked Questions. (2023, July 28). Texas Education Agency. <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/subject-areas/health-and-physical-education/physical-education>

About: Texas Child Health Status Report

These reports utilize state-level data from the Texas School Physical Activity and Nutrition (Texas SPAN) Project 2021-2023 to provide an accurate representation of Texas child health.

Learn more at go.uth.edu/TexasChildHealth

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