

Study reveals new factors that help to increase children's physical activity

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(Medical Xpress) -- Physical activity has important benefits for children's physical health and mental well-being but many children do not meet recommended levels. A new study into the factors which motivate children's active play has found that overall physical activity is increased in children who have access to green spaces in their neighbourhood.

The research, led by Rowan Brockman, Dr Russell Jago and Professor Ken Fox from the University of Bristol's Centre for Exercise, Nutrition and Health Sciences, involved eleven focus groups comprising 77 [children](#), aged 10- to 11-years from four primary schools. The focus groups examined the factors which motivate, facilitate and limit children's active play, including social and environmental determinants.

The team found that children were motivated to engage in active play because they perceived it to be enjoyable, to prevent boredom, to have physical and mental health benefits, and to provide freedom from adult constraint, rules and structure.

However, children's active play was constrained by a number of factors, including rainy weather and fear of groups of teenagers in their play spaces. Some features of the physical environment facilitated children's active play, including the

presence of green spaces and cul-de-sacs in the neighbourhood. Additionally, children's use of mobile phones when playing away from home was reported to alleviate parents' safety fears, and therefore assist in children's active play.

Rowan Brockman, a researcher in the Centre for Exercise, Nutrition and Health, said: "Preventing the decline in [physical activity](#), which occurs around 10- to 11-years of age, is a public health priority. Understanding the factors that help motivate, facilitate and limit active play is fundamental in developing interventions to increase children's physical activity.

"These findings link in with the London 2012 legacy plans for the 'Places People Play' campaign, to secure future investment for protecting children's outdoor play spaces, such as parks and playing fields."

Maura Gillespie, Head of Policy and Public Affairs at the British Heart Foundation, said: "This study is a reminder that children really want to play outside, and it's a fun way for them to get the exercise they need. It also underlines the importance of green spaces amongst the urban jungle - both children and adults need these public spaces.

"We recommend an hour a day of exercise for children, and active play outdoors is a great way to achieve that target."

Funded by the British Heart Foundation and published in BMC Public Health, the study is part of a larger project, the Active Play Project (TAPP), which examines the contribution of active play to the overall physical activity of primary school children.

For a full version of the report visit the [BMC Public Health website](#).

Provided by University of Bristol

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