

# PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

## Public Health Issue

Being physically active is one of the most important steps that Americans of all ages can take to improve their health and their weight. Regular physical activity in children and adolescents is critical for physical health and wellness. Compared to those who are inactive, physically active youth have higher levels of cardiorespiratory fitness and stronger muscles. They also typically have lower body fat levels, stronger bones, and they may have reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression. Youth who participate in regular physical activity have a better chance of a healthy adulthood and are less likely to develop risk factors that lead to chronic conditions.[1]

Insufficient physical activity is one of the leading risk factors for obesity, and obesity is a leading risk factor for preventable chronic disease such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. Currently, one out of four (26.3%) public high school students in Florida are overweight or obese.[2] Encouraging and promoting physical activity among our youngest populations is necessary to ensure healthy habits begin early in life and are continued into adulthood.

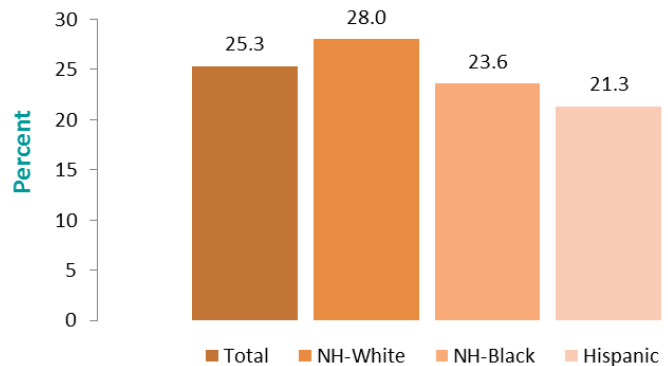
## Magnitude and Trends

Prior to 2011, youth physical activity was captured as two separate measures – vigorous physical activity and moderate physical activity. Beginning in 2011, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) changed their approach and began collecting the combined total time youth participated in both vigorous and moderate physical activity. Therefore, trend data for this measure are not available.

In Florida, approximately one out of four public high school students (25.3%) met the current recommendation of being physically active for a total of 60 minutes per day on all of the past seven days. This is lower than the national prevalence (27.1%) although not statistically different.

In 2013, Florida male public high school students (34.1%) had a significantly higher prevalence of meeting the current federal physical guidelines for aerobic physical activity than females (16.4%). Non-Hispanic (NH) white (28.0%) public high school students had a significantly higher prevalence of this behavior than NH black (23.6%) and Hispanic (21.3%) public high schools students (Figure 1). [3]

**Figure 1. Youth Daily Physical Activity, Race/Ethnicity, Florida 2013**



Source: Youth Risk Behavior Survey

## National and State Goals

Released in 2008, the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans (PAG) [1] is the first-ever publication of national guidelines for physical activity. The physical activity objectives for

Healthy People 2020 reflect the strong state of the science supporting the health benefits of regular physical activity among youth and adults, as identified in the PAG.

The Healthy People 2020 Objective PA-3.1 is to increase the proportion of adolescents who meet current federal physical activity guidelines for aerobic physical activity to 20.2% [2]. As of 2013, Florida public high school students have met this target although closer examination of the data discussed above demonstrates that females differ greatly from males in this behavior, and have not yet achieved the target goal.

The PAG specifies that children and adolescents should do 60 minutes (1 hour) or more of physical activity daily. Working together to meet Healthy People 2020 targets through a multidisciplinary approach is critical to increasing the levels of physical activity and improving health in the United States. [4]

Additionally, physical activity is a TVIS 3.0 Measure. Specifically, the goal of this measure is to increase the number of children (ages 6-11 years) and adolescents (ages 12-17 years) who are physically active. Data for physical activity among children ages 6-11 years is not readily available.

## Current State Programs and Initiatives

In response to the obesity epidemic, the Florida Department of Health (FDOH) launched the Healthiest Weight Florida initiative in early 2013 as a priority of the State Surgeon General. Healthiest Weight Florida is a public-private collaboration bringing together state agencies, not for profit organizations, businesses, and entire communities to help Florida's children and adults make consistent, informed choices about healthy eating and active living. The FDOH has many initiatives and programs in place to increase physical activity among children and adolescents. Ongoing projects include efforts targeted towards working with early childhood education centers and schools to develop and implement policies relating to physical activity of the children and adolescents while they are in the centers/schools. Many other groups, including nonprofit organizations, are also focused on increasing physical activity among youth. Programs such as the Alliance for a Healthier Generation's Healthy Schools Program and the Healthier United States Schools Challenge emphasize the importance of incorporating physical activity into the school day and teaching children and their parents about the importance of physical activity.

Additional efforts are focused on improving the environments our children live in that encourage physical activity. Examples include schools that make their playgrounds available to the public after school hours, cities improving streets to include bike paths and walking lanes, and the Safe Routes to Schools Program.

## Public Health Strategies and Practices

Developing and implementing policies and practices around physical activity guidelines in early childhood education centers and schools has shown to be an effective approach to increasing physical activity among youth.

Healthiest Weight Florida employs five strategies, closely aligned with recommendations from national expert organizations like the CDC and the Institute of Medicine, to address behavior and environmental change. The first strategy is to increase opportunities for physical activity, such as walking during break times and stand work stations.

## DOH Capacity

The FDOH receives funding from the CDC specifically aimed at improving physical activity among all Floridians, including children and adolescents. The FDOH is currently engaged in multiple projects to increase physical activity, but there are some opportunities that could potentially allow for additional success. Many schools are reluctant to open their playgrounds after school hours due to concern of liability issues. For the past several years, legislation to reduce or remove this liability from schools has been proposed and discussed.

Physical activity requirements for Florida's schools are another area that could be greatly improved by statute. Florida has very limited requirements for physical activity in schools compared to other states. Florida public high schools students are required to complete one credit of physical education at some point during their high school career, although no amount of time for physical activity is specified. As a comparison, New York state policy mandates at least 90 minutes per week of physical education in all four years of high school. [5]

## References

1. Physical Activity Guidelines (2008). Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, Office of the Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from: <http://www.health.gov/PAGuidelines/>
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5. Curriculum and Instruction - New York State Education Policy. Retrieved from: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/pe/peqa.html>