

Preschoolers need more outdoor playtime in daycare ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Daycare centers play a very important role in helping preschoolers reach their daily physical exercise needs. But a new study shows that very few children get adequate outdoor recess time.

Only three in 10 children had at least 60 minutes of a full child-care day outdoors for recess, as is recommended by current guidelines.

"We know daily physical activity is essential for children's growth and development. It improves cardiovascular and bone health and has been linked to improved mood, attention, and cognitive performance," said senior author Kristen Copeland, M.D., of Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

"Yet, few preschoolers are meeting daily physical activity recommendations of 60 minutes or more per day."

The findings of the Preschool Eating and Activity Study (PEAS) revealed that children in daycare centers who did receive at least 60 minutes of outdoor time were more active over 24 hours than children that did not get this time. In fact, the amount of outdoor time while at child care was the only factor that predicted the total amount of physical activity children obtained over the full 24-hour day.

"These opportunities may be especially important for children who lack opportunities to be active at home," said Copeland. "That's why what happens in the child care centers has important and lasting effects for children's total daily levels of activity."

For the study, researchers at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center evaluated 380 children ranging in age from three to six years-old who were enrolled at 30 different child care centers from November 2009 to January 2011.

Ninety percent of the centers that took part in the study reported scheduling two or more outdoor sessions daily, yet only 40 percent of children had taken part. Thirty-two percent had no time outdoors.

The Preschool Eating and Activity Study is the first study to examine center influences on children's physical activity over the full 24-hour day and over a wide range of weather conditions. Poor weather conditions were partly responsible for keeping children indoors.

"To ensure that children receive adequate opportunities to be active, centers that regularly face inclement conditions should make better use of indoor spaces and encourage teachers to take children outdoors briefly on cold days," said Copeland.

The findings are published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine.

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Region: United States ^[3]

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outdoor activity ^[5]

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