

Kids need us to help get them moving!

The 2014 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card¹ was released amid much fanfare at the Global Summit on the Physical Activity of Children held in Toronto this May. In this report card, Canada was compared with 14 other countries for the first time. How did we do? We fared very poorly, tying for second-to-last place with Australia, Ireland, and the US, and finishing only ahead of Scotland. What was our grade? A dismal D-. The countries that received the best marks were New Zealand and Mozambique (both received a B grade). Mexico also did well with a C+. Canada received a D- because only 7% of kids aged 5 to 11 meet the guideline of 60 minutes of daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity, and this falls to 4% for kids aged 12 to 17.

Missing from the report was a comparison with our grade from the first report card released 10 years ago. Our grade then was also a D-. Essentially, there has been no improvement in the last 10 years.

Why do we do so poorly compared with countries like New Zealand and Mozambique? It appears that these countries have a culture where kids are particularly active after school. Canada scores well in having many parks and public facilities available; however, these facilities are not being used. We also score well in the area of organized sport, but we are relying on this aspect far too much and it is only helpful for those who participate in sports. Physical activity levels in Canada also rank poorly because few kids walk or cycle to and from school. While 58% of parents say they always

walked to school when they were younger, only 28% say their kids do so today. Finally, kids today spend too much time on sedentary behaviors. There is increasing evidence that sedentary behavior is bad for our health, and this goes for adults as well.

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In my opinion, a D- is a failing grade and a failing grade requires remedial action. The report card reviews settings and influences on participation in and promotion of physical activity. This includes schools, family, and peer influences, as well as the community and built environment. I think something is missing from this assessment. Where is health?

News flash! The US surgeon general identified physical inactivity as the biggest public health crisis facing America—not obesity. And with such a big problem, everyone needs to do their part.

Doctors of BC has been expanding the annual Walk With Your Doc events and beginning to incorporate Exercise

is Medicine into these events. In the fall, Doctors of BC sponsors the Be Active Every Day program, where we challenge school kids to be active for 60 minutes per day for 4 weeks. We ask doctors from across the province to devote time to going to their local schools and speaking with kids to promote being active. We also use the 5-2-1-0 message, which stands for eating 5 fruits and vegetable daily, not having more than 2 hours of screen time a day, doing 1 hour of physical activity a day, and consuming 0 sugar sweetened drinks. Doctors of BC is also developing resources such as a physician's guide and handouts for kids, and providing assistance when needed. Emily Zurrer and Brittany Baxter, two star players from Canada's Women's National Soccer Team who will be competing in the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup in Canada, will be encouraging kids to keep active via a series of videos to be shown in schools. As I write this, I am at the North American Indigenous Games in Regina as the doctor for Team BC. It is great to see almost 5000 Aboriginal youth participating in sports. For them, sport *is* medicine. It helps them develop skills that will help them succeed in life in a healthy way. All of us need this. So let's get involved and do our part to promote healthy habits for kids.

**—Ron Wilson, MD
Chair, Athletics and Recreation
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Reference

1. Active Healthy Kids Canada. 2014 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth. Accessed 28 July 2014. www.activehealthykids.ca/ReportCard/2014/ReportCard.aspx.

This article is the opinion of the Council on Health Promotion and has not been peer reviewed by the BCMJ Editorial Board.