

SPOTLIGHT ON PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH:

2026 Progress Report

PARTICIPACTION

Let's make room to move

ABOUT THE PROGRESS REPORT

Since the release of the 2024 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, new and important data have become available. This progress report provides new insights into the movement behaviours of children (ages 5 to 11 years) and youth (ages 12 to 17 years) in Canada and includes updated findings for six key indicators: overall physical activity, active play, active transportation, organized sport, sedentary behaviours and sleep.

This report also complements the 2024 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, which provides a more comprehensive assessment of behaviours, settings, systems and supports. Refer to the 2024 Report Card for additional indicators and recommendations.



INTRODUCTION

Canada's youth are redefining how Canadians live. They show us how to embrace a digital-first world, and most approach life with an entrepreneurial mindset that previous generations didn't exercise until they entered the workforce. Youth are often the first to adopt or create viral trends and they certainly aren't the last to leave older generations wondering things like, "is youth wasted on the young?" or "what does 'rizz' mean!?" (By the way, "rizz" is used to describe one's charm or level of "coolness".)

Canada's youth are also now the most inactive age group in the country.[1] While physical activity levels among children have remained relatively stable over time, youth physical activity levels, particularly among girls, have steeply declined.[2]

Just 33% of boys and 8% of girls ages 12 to 17 years meet the national physical activity recommendation.[1]

This progress report also reveals that fewer children and youth are meeting screen time recommendations.

Less than a third of youth are meeting the recommended recreational screen time limit of no more than 2 hours per day.[1,3]

Looking at activity trends, we can see that many young people have not recovered from pandemic-related declines in physical activity. But lower than usual physical activity levels among youth are more than just a lingering pandemic effect; it is a broader public health concern – especially among a population that is currently facing a mental health crisis.[4] The persistent inequities by sex and gender also require attention to ensure that more girls are maximizing their health, given the lifelong physical, mental and social benefits associated with regular movement.[5,6] Unlike pop-culture and tech trends, **Canada can't afford to assume that a lack of movement among youth is just a phase that will fade out.**





The good news? There's momentum in the right direction. The data in this report show that **many children and youth are getting at least *some* daily physical activity**, with many literally just a few steps away from meeting movement guidelines. This tells us that even small increases in daily movement could make a meaningful difference. Whether it is walking or wheeling to school, joining a recreational activity or active outdoor play, any movement is better than none.[7]

But getting children and youth from no movement to some – or some to more – can't solely be the responsibility of individuals and families. **Children and youth are more likely to be active when communities, schools and policies support and encourage movement in everyday life**. Coordinated and sustained investments from the public and private sectors, combined with long-term planning that involves schools, community programming and policy intervention at all levels of government is needed to create long-term positive change.

Additionally, Canada should consider the benefits of youth-led policy consultation and initiatives. Youth can do much more than keep older generations up to date on the latest technology and popular new slang; they can and should help reimagine physical activity supports throughout the country.

THE GRADES

OVERALL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY:

37% of children and youth accumulate an average of at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) per day (specifically: 52% of children, 21% of youth).[1]

*2024 Grade: D+**

D+

Key Recommendation:

All levels of government, schools and community organizations should prioritize sustained investments in programs, policies and supports that make daily movement accessible, inclusive and youth-centred, with targeted efforts to support adolescent girls.

ACTIVE PLAY:

20% of children and youth accumulate an average of at least two hours per day of indoor and outdoor unstructured play (specifically: 28% of children, 12% of youth).[3]

2024 Grade: D-

D-

Key Recommendation:

Schools, municipalities and community organizations should protect and promote regular unstructured active play by increasing access to safe outdoor spaces, reducing barriers to free play and encouraging active recreation throughout the day, particularly during adolescence.



*Comparisons to the 2024 Children & Youth Report Card should be interpreted with caution as additional data sources beyond the Canadian Health Measures Survey and the Parent Survey on Physical Activity and Sport were factored into the 2024 grade.

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION:

C-

43% of children and youth, as reported by their parents, use active modes of transportation to get to or from school, either exclusively or in combination with non-active modes.[3] This includes 42% of children and 44% of youth.

43% of children and youth, as reported by their parents, walk to destinations such as friends' homes, parks, or shops at least three days per week.[3] This includes 40% of children and 45% of youth.

2024 Grade: C-

Key Recommendation:

Governments, schools and urban planners should continue to invest in safe, connected and equitable active transportation infrastructure and school travel initiatives that make walking and wheeling between locations easier, safer and more practical for children and youth.



ORGANIZED SPORT:

72% of children and youth participated in organized sport in the past 12 months (specifically: 75% of children, 70% of youth).[3]

2024 Grade: B

B

Key Recommendation:

Sport organizations, schools and recreation providers should prioritize a variety of affordable, inclusive and flexible sport opportunities, including non-traditional sports, that support continued participation during adolescence, particularly among girls and youth facing barriers to participation.

SEDENTARY BEHAVIOURS:

31% of children and youth meet the recommended recreational screen time limit of averaging no more than 2 hours per day (specifically: 43% of children, 18% of youth). *This estimate represents an average across available data sources.*[1,3]

*2024 Grade: D**

D

Key Recommendation:

Families, schools, governments and the technology sector can support healthier digital environments and reduce recreational screen time by introducing device-free times and spaces, enhancing digital literacy, enacting school-based policies, utilizing public awareness campaigns and implementing age-appropriate technology design.



*Comparisons to the 2024 Children & Youth Report Card should be interpreted with caution as additional data sources beyond the Canadian Health Measures Survey and the Parent Survey on Physical Activity and Sport were factored into the 2024 grade.



SLEEP:

69% of children and youth meet the recommended age-specific sleep durations (specifically: 77% of children, 60% of youth). *This estimate represents an average across available data sources.*[3,8]**

*2024 Grade: B-**

B

Key Recommendation:

Families, schools and policymakers can help children and youth, especially adolescents, achieve sufficient sleep by supporting routines, schedules, environments and policy that promote healthy sleep patterns (e.g., ensuring consistent sleep and wake times, limiting screen use before bedtime, aligning school, recreation and family schedules, such as school start times, with the sleep needs of children and youth).

*Comparisons to the 2024 Children & Youth Report Card should be interpreted with caution as additional data sources beyond the Canadian Health Measures Survey and the Parent Survey on Physical Activity and Sport were factored into the 2024 grade.

**For 5- to 13-year-olds: 9 to 11 hours per night; for 14- to 17-year-olds: 8 to 10 hours per night.

NEW INSIGHTS

Girls are less likely than boys to meet the physical activity recommendation at all ages, with the gap widening during adolescence.

- Among children, 66% of boys meet the physical activity recommendation, compared to 37% of girls.[1]
- Among youth, 33% of boys meet the physical activity recommendation, compared to 8% of girls.[1]



Many children and youth are quite close to meeting the physical activity recommendation.

- Compared to youth, children are more than twice as likely to meet the physical activity recommendation, but many children and youth are also close to achieving recommended levels of MVPA (see **Figure 1**).
  - 52% of children, compared to 21% of youth, meet the physical activity recommendation.[1]
  - 32% of children and 24% of youth were regularly active but fell just below recommendation achievement (i.e., get 40 to <60 minutes of MVPA per day, on average). In children, this represents the largest proportion of those not currently meeting guidelines.[2]
  - 17% of youth, compared to just 2% of children, get less than 20 minutes of MVPA per day; among youth, many would need to adopt significant lifestyle changes to meet the physical activity recommendation.[2]

Knowing how many children and youth meet the recommendation only tells part of the story. To drive meaningful action, we also need to understand how close – or how far – children and youth are from reaching it, and which groups are falling furthest behind.

Figure 1. How close are children and youth to meeting the physical activity recommendation? Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Health Measures Survey 2022-2024.[2]

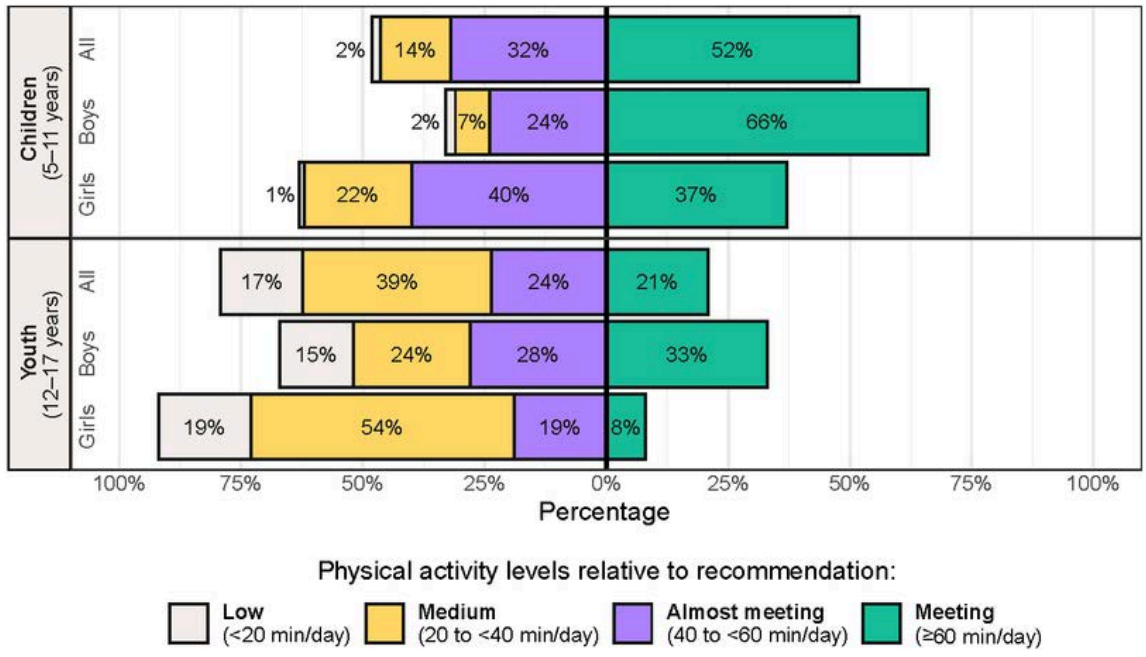


Figure adapted from: Colley RC, Barnes J, Michaud I, Gribbon A, Clarke J. Trends in physical activity among Canadian children and youth from 2007 to 2024. Health Reports. 2026. Under review.

Children's physical activity levels remained relatively stable between 2007 and 2024; however, recent data (2022-2024) indicate that youth are far less likely to achieve the physical activity recommendation than they were prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Combining the past seven cycles of Canadian Health Measures Survey (CHMS) data collection (2007-2024), trends over time show that the COVID-19 pandemic affected the physical activity levels of youth more negatively than children (**Figure 2**).[2]
  - Among children, physical activity remained stable between 2007 and 2024; among youth, physical activity was stable between 2007 and 2019 while the post-pandemic data show a decline.[2]
    - 50% of youth boys met the physical activity recommendation in 2018-2019, compared to 33% in 2022-2024 (down 17 percentage points).[2]
    - 21% of youth girls met the physical activity recommendation in 2018-2019, compared to 8% in 2022-2024 (down 13 percentage points).[2]

Figure 2.Physical activity gap between boys and girls has persisted for nearly 20 years. Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Health Measures Survey 2007-2024.[2]

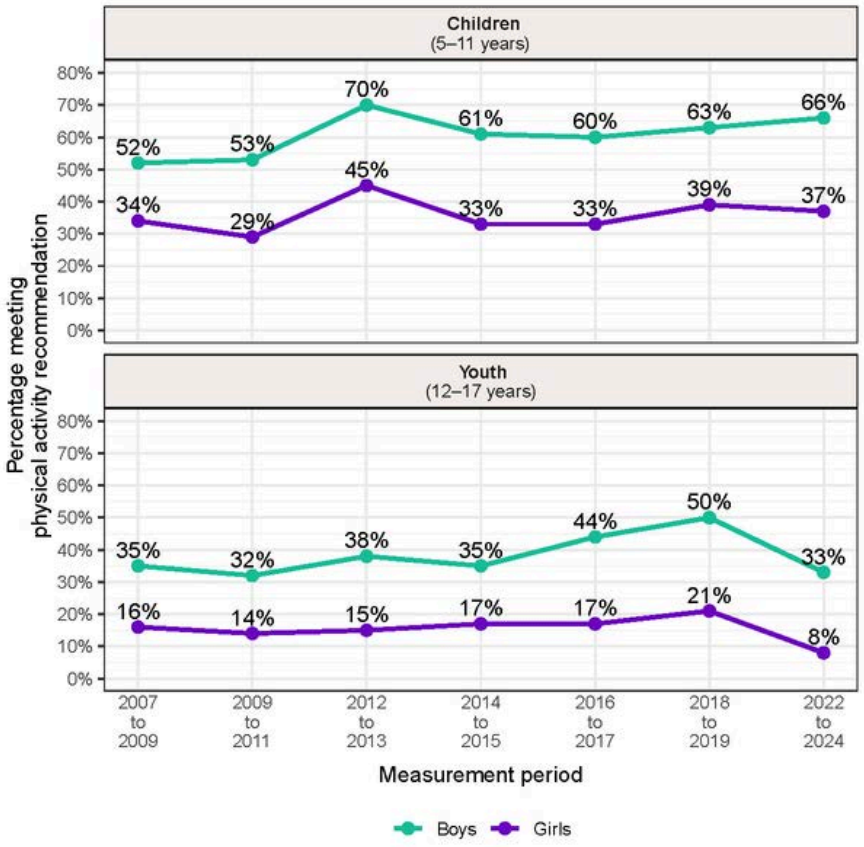
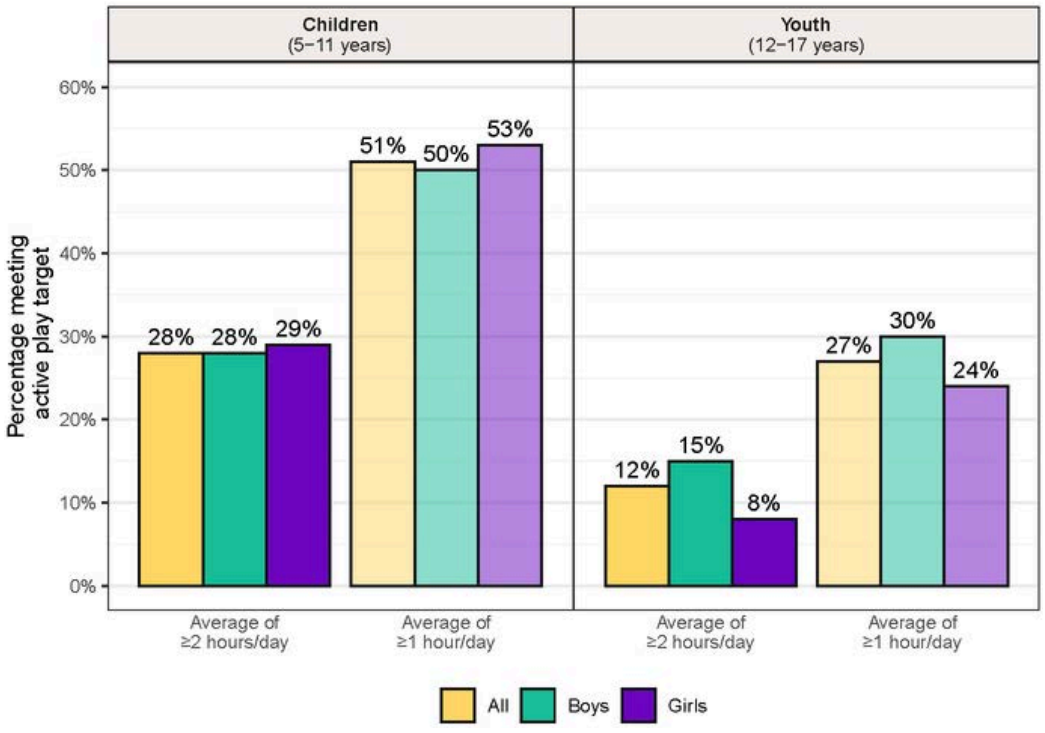


Figure adapted from: Colley RC, Barnes J, Michaud I, Gribbon A, Clarke J. Trends in physical activity among Canadian children and youth from 2007 to 2024. Health Reports. 2026. Under review.

Although only 1 in 5 children and youth reportedly get 2 hours per day of active play, participation nearly doubles when considering those who participate in an average of 1 hour per day of active play. Youth, particularly girls, report the lowest levels of active play.

- 20% of children and youth reportedly meet the benchmark of at least 2 hours of active play per day, on average, while 39% of children and youth reportedly accumulate at least 1 hour of active play per day, on average.[8]
- Rates of active play are consistently higher among children than youth (**Figure 3**).
  - 28% of children compared to 12% of youth reportedly participate in an average of at least 2 hours of active play per day (16 percentage point difference).[8]
  - 51% of children compared to 27% of youth reportedly participate in an average of at least 1 hour of active play per day (24 percentage point difference).[8]
- While boys and girls report similar levels of active play during childhood, participation declines more sharply among girls during adolescence (**Figure 3**).
  - Youth girls are the least likely group to achieve the active play target.[8]

Figure 3. In children, rates of active play are similar across genders; youth girls are least likely to meet active play targets. Source: Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, Parent Survey on Physical Activity and Sport 2025.



Fewer than half of children and youth reportedly use active transportation.

- A slightly higher percentage of boys compared to girls regularly use active travel to get to and from school (45% of boys versus 41% of girls) and to get around their neighbourhood (46% of boys versus 40% of girls), as reported by their parents.[3]
- A slightly greater percentage of youth (45%) than children (40%) regularly use active travel to get around their neighbourhood, as reported by their parents.[3]

Organized sport participation rates continue to decline as girls enter youth.

- While organized sport participation is similar among boys and girls during childhood (77% of boys versus 73% of girls), girls are less likely to participate during adolescence (64%) compared to boys (74%).[3]

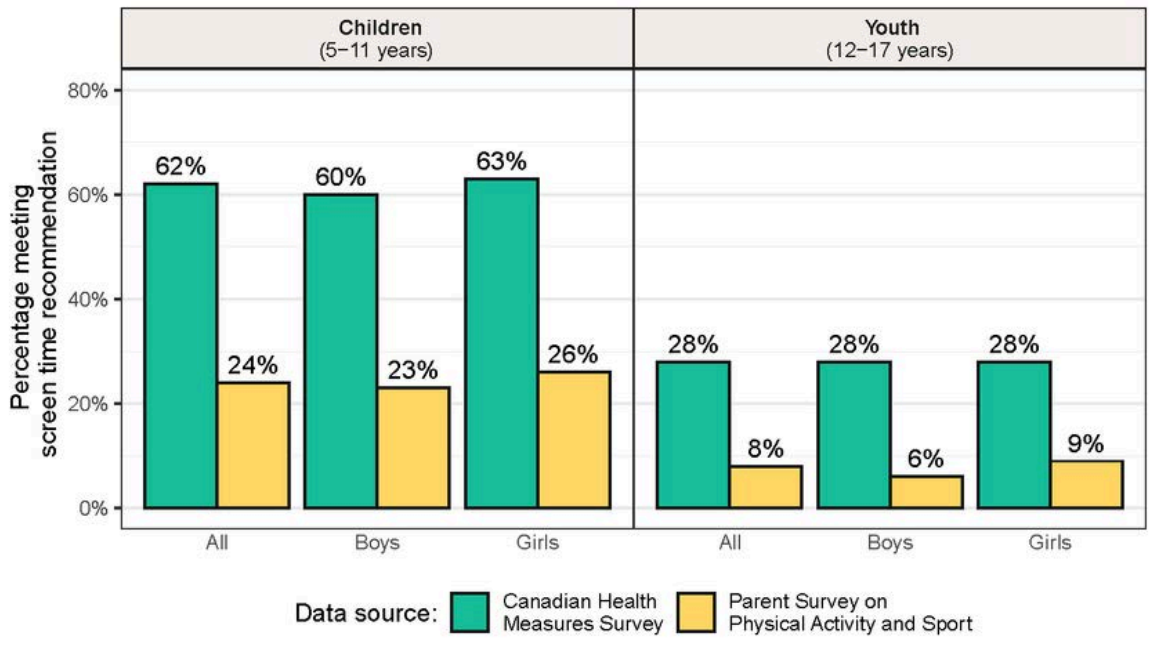


Youth are less likely than children to meet the screen time recommendation, with little difference between boys and girls.



- Regardless of data source, youth consistently have lower reported adherence to the screen time recommendation than children, yet screen use estimates varied between available sources with the 2025 Parent Survey on Physical Activity and Sport (PSPAS) estimating lower adherence to the recommendation than the 2022-2024 CHMS (**Figure 4**).[1,3]
- Overall adherence to the screen time recommendation in children and youth has declined 7 percentage points since 2018-2019: from 52% to 45% in 2022-2024.[1]
  - *Among children:* adherence to the screen time recommendation dropped 11 percentage points, from 73% in 2018-2019 to 62% in 2022-2024.
  - *Among youth:* adherence to the screen time recommendation dropped 3 percentage points, from 31% in 2018-2019 to 28% in 2022-2024.

Figure 4. Adherence to screen recommendations was slightly lower in boys than girls across both children and youth, but differences were small and inconsistent between data sources in youth. Sources: Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, Parent Survey on Physical Activity and Sport 2025; Statistics Canada, Canadian Health Measures Survey 2022-2024.

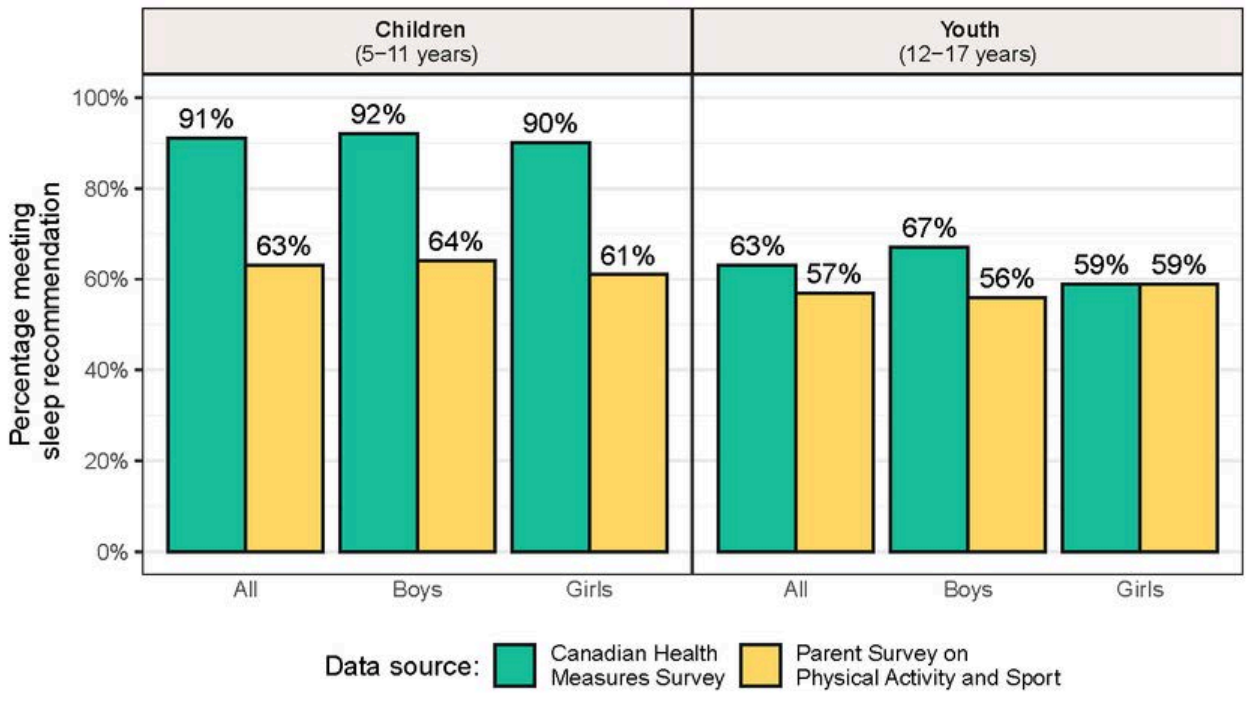




Most children and youth are getting enough sleep, but youth are less likely than children to meet sleep recommendations.

- According to the 2022-2024 CHMS, 77% of children and youth (specifically: 91% of children, 63% of youth) reportedly meet their age-specific sleep recommendation.[8]
- The 2025 PSPAS shows similar trends, but lower overall adherence rates, with just 60% of children and youth (specifically: 63% of children, 57% of youth) reportedly meeting sleep duration recommendations.[3]
- Findings on sex and gender differences in adherence to sleep recommendations are similar between boys and girls among children, but inconsistent between data sources among youth (**Figure 5**).

Figure 5. Adherence to sleep recommendations is highest in children; sex and gender differences in youth are inconsistent. Sources: Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, Parent Survey on Physical Activity and Sport 2025; Statistics Canada, Canadian Health Measures Survey 2022-2024.



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ABOUT THIS SPOTLIGHT

This progress report provides a focused snapshot of current movement behaviours using the latest available data from Canada's national monitoring systems: Statistics Canada's Canadian Health Measures Survey and the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute's 2025 Parent Survey on Physical Activity and Sport.

Grades were assigned collaboratively by ParticipACTION, the Chief Scientific Officer and data partners using the same grading system as the 2024 Report Card. Where possible, findings were examined by age and sex/gender. Data for other equity-denied groups were not available for this Spotlight.

Because the Spotlight uses a narrower set of data sources than the ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, findings are best interpreted as an update on recent trends and patterns rather than as direct comparisons with previous grades.

Data Sources

Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (CFLRI): Parent Survey on Physical Activity and Sport (PSPAS)

The Parent Survey on Physical Activity and Sport collects parent-reported information about children's and youth's participation in physical activity, sport, active play, active transportation, screen time and sleep. Data included in this Spotlight use recent (2025) data and reflect responses from parents and guardians of children and youth aged 5 to 17 years.

Statistics Canada: Canadian Health Measures Survey (CHMS)

The Canadian Health Measures Survey collects health information from people in Canada, including directly measured physical activity and sedentary time. This Spotlight uses recent (2022-2024) and trend (2007-2024) data for children and youth aged 5 to 17 years.

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