



# Maryland State Advisory Council on Physical Fitness

Department of Health and Mental Hygiene  
www.MarylandFitness.org

## Youth Physical Activity Recommendations

The Maryland State Advisory Council on Physical Fitness recommends that all youths from **infancy through age 17**, regardless of ability, engage in daily physical activity. The benefits of regular physical activity for youths include:

- Healthier bones and muscles
- Improved endurance, strength, flexibility and body composition (increased muscle and decreased fat)
- Decreased risk factor development for numerous chronic conditions including heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes
- Improved mood and feelings of well-being; reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression
- Possible enhanced cognitive function

The Council believes that all youths should not have extended periods of inactivity, but that they should engage in daily physical activity that is appropriate for their age group:

- **Infants** should be provided with opportunities for physical activity that involve the safe exploration of their environment and that promote the development of motor skills.
- **Toddlers** should accumulate at least 30 minutes and **preschoolers** should accumulate at least 60 minutes of daily, *structured* physical activity that enhance movement skills.
- **Toddlers and preschoolers** should engage in at least 60 minutes and up to several hours of daily, *unstructured* physical activity in safe environments and should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time except when sleeping.
- **Elementary school-aged children** should accumulate at least 30 to 60 minutes of age and developmentally-appropriate physical activity chosen from a variety of activities each day.
- **Elementary school-aged children** are encouraged to accumulate more than 60 minutes, and up to several hours of age and developmentally-appropriate physical activity each day.
- Some of the **elementary school-aged child's** daily physical activity should be in periods lasting 10 to 15 minutes or more and include moderate to vigorous activity with brief periods of rest and recovery.
- **Middle and high school-aged children** should be physically active every day as part of play, games, sports, work, transportation, recreation, physical education, or planned activity in the context of family, school and community activities.
- **Middle and high school-aged children** need three or more sessions a week of moderate to vigorous physical activity that lasts 20 minutes or more in addition to accumulating the 30 minutes of daily, moderate lifestyle physical activity (e.g., brisk walking) recommended for people of all ages. Daily moderate to vigorous physical activity of longer duration, within limits, can result in additional health gains. Skills that develop flexibility, muscular strength and endurance should be included in a well-rounded activity program.