Many young kids attend child care centres daily. The Preschooler Focus published an issue about physical activity in child care in 2011. There is lots of new research to share with you. We also want to remind readers about the Ontario Ministry of Education's regulations for physical activity and outdoor time in child care. Being active at child care will help kids grow up healthy.

In many areas there are laws that child care centres must follow. For example, Ontario released the Child Care and Early Years Act in 2014, with an update in 2017. Here are some of the highlights that support physical activity, nutrition and health:

- Each day should include indoor and outdoor play, with some of this being active, energetic play. Children should also be given quiet time to rest.
- Kids in care for 6 or more hours a day must spend at least 2 hours outdoors.
- Before and after-school programs must include at least 30 minutes of outdoor time.
- Centres need to have enough indoor and outdoor play space (at least 2.8 square meters per child of open indoor play space and 5.6 square meters per child of outdoor play space).
- Drinking water must be available at all times.
- Meals, snacks and beverages provided by the centres must meet the recommendations of "Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide".
In Canada, the majority of young kids in child care spend at least 30 hours per week in care. And, some kids may spend up to 40 or 50 hours per week in child care. Because of this, it is important for child care centres to ensure children are active each day. Children are typically more active in centres that offer more outdoor time and have more outdoor space. Some research says that one way to increase physical activity is by having multiple, shorter outdoor breaks instead of one long outdoor break. Kids tend to have a burst of activity when they first get outside, but they may get tired before the outdoor break is over. Active opportunities in child care should also include both structured activity time and free play. Structured activities and lessons can help kids develop motor skills, like skipping and throwing. Free play lets kids use their imaginations and practice cooperation with their friends.

Tips for child care centres:
• Break outdoor time into shorter, more frequent sessions. Kids are most active at the beginning of outdoor breaks.
• Plan indoor active programs for bad weather days. If space is limited, break up into smaller groups and take turns playing active games.
• Consider active field trips, like visiting playgrounds or splash pads.
• Remind parents to dress children for any weather conditions. With the right clothes, kids can get active outside in any weather!
• Motivate staff to be active role models. Kids love being active with teachers and leaders!
• Provide equipment and toys that encourage physical activity, like skipping ropes and balls. Try rotating what equipment is available to let kids try new things.

Four hundred preschoolers participated in our Health Outcomes and Physical activity in Preschoolers (HOPP) Study. The 3-to-5 year olds in our study attended many different child care arrangements: at home with parent, relative or caregiver, away from home with relative, unlicensed home-based care, licensed home-based care and licensed child care centres. We found that physical activity levels and fitness were not different among kids in different child care arrangements. All types of child care play a role in providing opportunities for young kids to be active every day.

The Child Health & Exercise Medicine Program at McMaster University is working to advance child health through excellence in research.
To learn about our current studies, visit us online at fhs.mcmaster.ca/chemp

References

Copyright © 2017 HAT Caldwell, NA Proudfoot & BW Timmons. Child Health & Exercise Medicine Program, McMaster University. Published and distributed by the Child Health & Exercise Medicine Program. All rights reserved. Download and use of this newsletter or its content is for non-commercial use only and must be accompanied by this copyright notice or attribution to the authors and owners must be specified.