

# Extra Credit: Get Active

Public Health Working  
to Increase Physical Activity

APRIL 2015



— THE 2015 COLORADO —  
Health Report Card



The Colorado Health Foundation™

# THE 2015 COLORADO Health Report Card

The Colorado Health Foundation released the 2015 Colorado Health Report Card, its ninth annual, in early February. The Health Report Card, which tracks detailed information about 38 health indicators that cover a life span, provides a benchmark for measuring progress on pressing health issues. This Data Spotlight,

created in collaboration with the Colorado Health Institute, delves more deeply into a key indicator in the Health Report Card – physical activity – and highlights the role of the public health community in getting Coloradans more active. The physical activity measures in the Health Report Card are shown below.

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GRADES

**Healthy Children** (Ages 6-17)

Rank: **24**

**67.6%** of school-age children participated in 20+ minutes of vigorous physical activity on four or more days per week.

**Healthy Adolescents** (High School Age)

Rank: **13**

**49.1%** of adolescents participated in vigorous physical activity on five or more of the past seven days.

**Healthy Adults** (Ages 18-64)

Rank: **1**

**83.2%** of adults participated in any physical activity within the past month.

**Healthy Aging** (Ages 65+)

Rank: **2**

**76.1%** of older adults participated in any physical activity within the past month.

Rank reflects Colorado's standing among all states. A rank of 1 is the best.

# Introduction

Public health officials are leading the race to ensure that Coloradans are active, working to provide all residents with healthy and safe environments that promote physical activity.

Because regular physical activity helps to improve both physical and mental health,<sup>1,2</sup> this work by the public health community is a key strategy to reach the goal of making Colorado the healthiest state.

Colorado is moving in the right direction. The percentage of school-age children engaging in regular exercise has steadily increased since 2003, though kids still aren't meeting recommended levels. Adults and seniors are more active than most of their peers across the country.

But Colorado hasn't reached the finish line yet.

First, Coloradans aren't on equal footing when it comes to being active. Income, geography, gender and sexual orientation all affect the levels of physical activity. Many communities face challenges in providing adequate infrastructure for exercise, such as sidewalks and parks. Others are battling safety concerns related to crime that can keep people indoors and inactive.

Regardless of where they live, Colorado youth are not making the grade on physical activity.

Many children don't meet the recommended hour each day of activity,<sup>3</sup> which could be setting them up for lifelong health

concerns. Children who aren't getting enough exercise may gain too much weight, increasing the likelihood that they will continue to struggle with their weight as they get older, and upping their risk for chronic illnesses such as diabetes and hypertension.

More than half of teens spend three or more hours each day behind a screen for non-homework activities – surfing the web, texting, playing video games or watching TV. That's time they could be physically active.

The state's grown-ups also have some homework to do if they want to raise their grade. Though they outperform those in other states, one of five adults and one of four seniors in Colorado report no physical activity at all.

Across the state, public health agencies are working to get Colorado active. Forty-three of the state's 54 local public health agencies have identified active living and healthy eating or obesity prevention as a priority. Many agencies are working with their communities to restore parks, install sidewalks and create safer routes to schools. They are forging relationships with non-traditional partners, like the Colorado Department of Transportation, and they are implementing evidence-based strategies.

What will that finish line look like when Colorado wins the physical activity race? We will be a state that makes being active easy, convenient and fun for all Coloradans.

## Key Takeaways

1. Colorado's youth are not as active as they should be. School-age kids and teens both fall short of the hour-a-day recommendation. Twenty-three states post higher physical activity rates for kids, and 12 have higher rates for teens.
2. More than half of teens spend three or more hours each day behind a screen – a computer, TV or phone.
3. Nearly half of teens said they could walk or ride a bike, scooter or skateboard to school, but only 20 percent actually do.
4. Girls trail boys when it comes to physical activity: 40 percent of teen girls report an hour of physical activity five days a week compared with about 58 percent of teen boys.
5. It's a different story for the state's grown-ups. Colorado's adults lead the nation in high rates of physical activity and seniors come in second. Still, many do not meet the recommended one to three hours of daily activity.
6. Where you live matters when it comes to physical activity. Additional disparities are related to gender, race and ethnicity, income and sexual orientation.
7. Physical activity, which has been shown to improve health, is a priority for 43 of the state's 54 local public health agencies and their community partners.

# Physical Activity and Colorado's Kids

Colorado's kids need a boost when it comes to exercise, falling far short of the 60 minutes each day recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In fact, kids in 23 states are more active than Colorado's kids.

Increased screen time is one culprit. More than half of Colorado's teens spend three or more hours each day behind a screen – and not for homework. Many are spending that time playing video games or using a computer for fun, a rate that has nearly doubled since 2009.

Girls trail boys when it comes to physical activity. About 40 percent of high school girls attend at least one physical education (PE) class a week compared with 52 percent of boys. And 58 percent of teen boys report at least an hour of physical activity five days a week compared with 40 percent of girls.

Teens who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) are less physically active than their heterosexual peers.<sup>4</sup> About 14.5 percent of the LGB teens report an hour of daily physical activity, half the rate of heterosexual teens (28 percent). Teens who identify as LGB are also more likely to say they were bullied or that they missed school because they felt unsafe, a potential factor in their lower levels of physical activity.

Opportunities to increase activity abound, both in school and out of school, through policy and organizational changes.

Less than half (46 percent) of Colorado teens attend at least one PE class a week, lower than the national average.

PE attendance is higher in some areas than others. Nearly 70 percent of teens in northeast Colorado – Washington, Morgan, Logan, Yuma, Phillips and Sedgewick counties – attend a weekly PE class, according to the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey. Weekly PE attendance drops to 25 percent in the northwest Colorado counties of Moffat, Rio Blanco, Routt and Jackson.

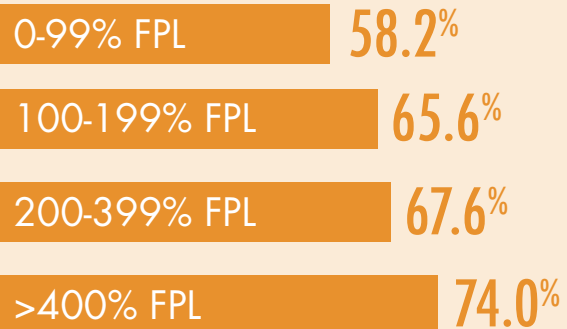
Meanwhile, some kids may be making up for a lack of PE by joining a sports team. Nearly two of three teens (61 percent) played on a team in the past year.

One strategy to increase physical activity among kids is to build it into their daily routines. While nearly half of teens said they could walk or ride a bike, scooter or skateboard to school, only 20 percent actually do. According to Colorado's Child Health Survey, the rate is a bit higher for

## Income and Activity: Stark Differences

Children living in poverty often have fewer opportunities for being active, resulting in lower levels of physical activity.

### PERCENTAGE ACTIVE\*



FPL = Federal Poverty Level

\* Active = 20+ minutes of physical activity 4+ days per week

school-age children at 30 percent. There has been a steep downward trend nationally in walking or biking to get to school in the past generation.<sup>5</sup>

The reasons kids aren't walking or riding to school are complex. For example, five percent of Colorado teens didn't go to school because they felt unsafe, either on their way or when they got there. Others may find it too far, there may not be sidewalks, or there may not be enough crossing guards.

## Parks and Rec

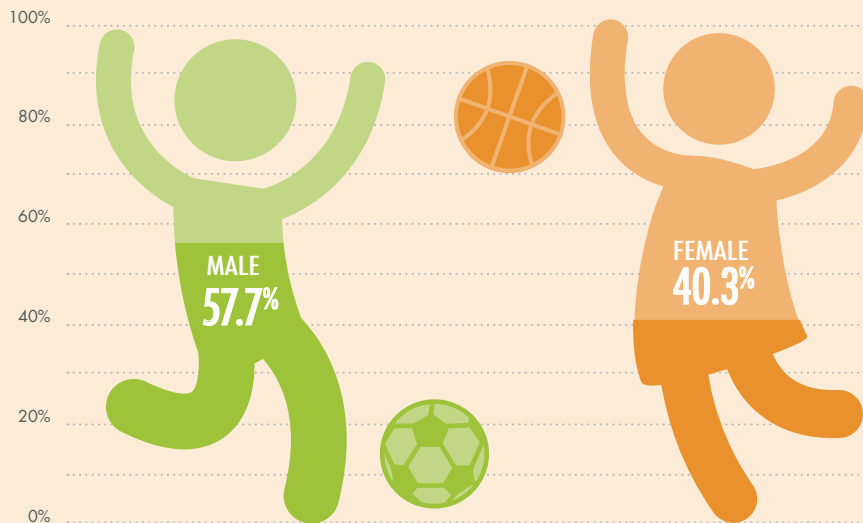
Colorado has an abundance of outdoor opportunities such as skiing, hiking and biking. But many of these activities are expensive or depend on reliable transportation. Having a nearby park makes it easier to engage in physical activity where they live. And some Coloradans live closer to parks than others.

Residents living along the Front Range generally have the best access to parks, though that access can vary widely within counties. Residents in 11 counties have no access to nearby parks, although many rural residents live close to open spaces and outdoor areas. While many rural counties have a limited number of parks, there are some counties, particularly on the Western Slope and Eastern Plains, that boast higher levels of parks.<sup>6</sup>

**ONLINE EXTRA:** For detailed data and a map highlighting park access, visit [www.ColoradoHealth.org/NPHWtoolkit](http://www.ColoradoHealth.org/NPHWtoolkit)

# Room for Improvement

## Teens getting one hour of physical activity 5+ days a week



And only **46 percent** of high school students attend one or more PE classes a week.

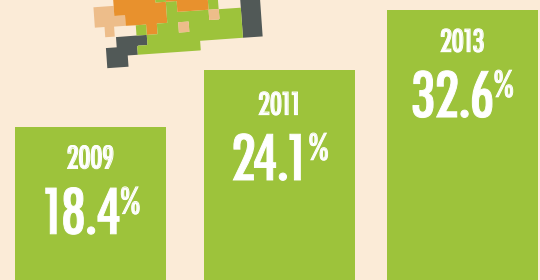
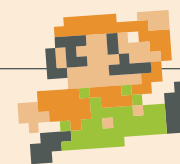


**Half of teens** say they could walk or ride a bike, scooter or skateboard to school, but only

**20%**  
actually do

More than half of teens spend **3+ hours** in front of a screen daily.

One of three spends that amount of time just playing video games or using a computer, up from 18.4% in 2009.



\* The Healthy Kids Colorado Survey replaced the Youth Risk Behavior Survey in 2013.

## Opportunities

The data show a number of gaps when it comes to kids and physical activity. Perhaps most striking is the low proportion of students attending a PE class, which can help to get kids active now, build healthy habits and encourage lifelong physical activity.

Colorado is one of only a few states that doesn't require PE at any grade level, but several schools have started building robust PE programs. Creative approaches range from using technology to get kids moving in Jefferson County Public Schools to incorporating outdoor activities such as snowshoeing and geocaching into PE at Denver Public School's PREP Academy.<sup>7</sup>

Girls represent another opportunity for physical activity improvement. Because of the significant physical activity gap between boys and girls, educational efforts and programs aimed at girls can have a big impact.

Increasing opportunities for affordable sports teams and other out-of-school physical activity is another way to get kids active. Partnering with schools, parents and state and local agencies is a good strategy. Regions of the state with limited options for out-of-school physical activity represent an opportunity for targeted attention.



# Physical Activity and Colorado's Adults and Seniors

Older Coloradans are working up a sweat.

Adults and seniors are leading the nation in getting at least some physical activity. Colorado's adults rank first among all states, with 83 percent reporting some activity in the past month. Seniors, with a physical activity level of 76 percent, trail only Oregon.

But the indicator sets the bar low. It reflects any physical activity in the past month. The data reveal that one of five adults in Colorado isn't getting any exercise. And one of four seniors isn't engaging in any physical activity, either. The CDC recommends that adults and seniors participate in one to three hours of aerobic and muscle-strengthening activities weekly.<sup>8</sup>

The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System reveals that about 78 percent of adults who identify as LGB are physically active, compared with 82 percent of heterosexual adults.

Meanwhile, barriers to physical activity for adults and seniors rise for those with lower incomes or rural residents.

Rural areas have some of the lowest levels of adult physical activity. One of five (22 percent) adults in Lincoln County in eastern Colorado report no physical activity in the past month. Many counties with low levels of physical activity also have limited access to exercise opportunities. Lincoln County, for example, ranks in the bottom five counties for access to exercise opportunities, with only five percent of residents having adequate access.<sup>9</sup>

Adults who are struggling to make ends meet have many competing priorities, and finding time to be active can be difficult. Lower-income adults are less likely to be active than those with higher annual incomes. One of four adults making less than \$10,000 a year does not get any physical activity, compared with one of 10 adults with annual incomes of more than \$75,000.

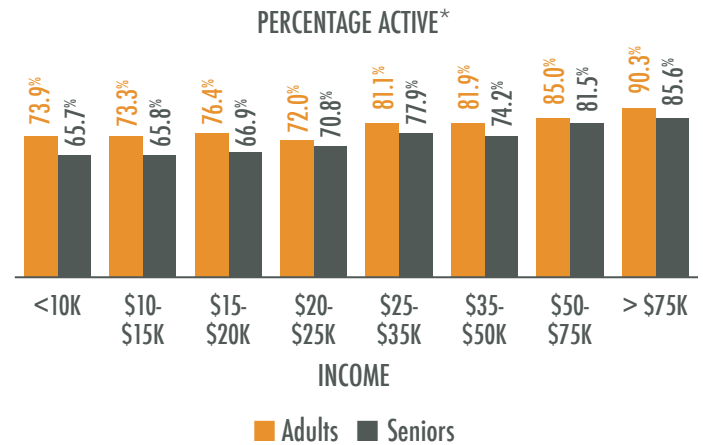


Colorado adults are #1 for physical activity

But sometimes #1 is not good enough.

1 of 5 adults reports no physical activity

**Income Matters:** Higher Incomes, More Active Lifestyles for Colorado's Adults and Seniors



\* Active = any activity in the past month.

## Opportunities

While Colorado's adults and seniors are active compared with those in other states, there are still many who don't have adequate opportunities for physical activity. The data demonstrate that Coloradans, particularly those with lower incomes, face significant barriers to physical activity. This information can help the public health community target the communities that are lagging.

While some adults are active at work, many spend the majority of their days inactive, presenting another option to

increase activity. The idea is to integrate physical activity into the settings where people spend the majority of their days – and for many adults, that's the workplace.

Companies and organizations across Colorado have launched a variety of programs and strategies, including standing desks, lunch-time walking breaks and incentives to use nearby gyms. The public health community is promoting these efforts, sharing best practices and encouraging employers to join the movement.

# Physical Activity and Public Health

Public health professionals confront health problems related to obesity every day. This has led 43 of Colorado's 54 public health agencies to identify healthy eating active living (HEAL) or obesity prevention as a local public health priority.<sup>10</sup>

Local public health agencies are partnering with key players in the community, including school administrators, employers, child care centers and traffic experts. They are working to eliminate barriers that discourage physical activity. In some towns, streets with heavy traffic are becoming more bike- and pedestrian-friendly with updated sidewalks and bike lanes. Others are cleaning and upgrading parks and tackling neighborhood crime, all to make it safer and easier to be active.

The partnerships are yielding many initiatives and programs aimed at increasing physical activity and reducing the risk of obesity. But how do we know that they are making a difference? The answer: data.

Public health agencies collect data to make the case for local and statewide initiatives aimed at getting Coloradans active and then to evaluate those initiatives. These data, combined with knowledge about evidence-based practices in other areas, will help to inform future efforts.

## Public Health: On the Front Line

### Data Collection and Analysis

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, in partnership with state agencies and local public health, provides leadership and resources for the biennial Healthy Kids Colorado Survey, which collects

data from thousands of middle and high school students on health behaviors, including physical activity. The data help inform strategies and policies developed by local public health and their community partners.

### Physical Activity in the Community

Healthy Mesa County, a partnership to improve the health and well-being of Mesa County residents, formed an action team to focus on active communities. The group is prioritizing active transportation, leveraging the area's trails and public spaces and raising awareness of the economic impact of investing in the infrastructure to make physical activity possible.

### Physical Activity in the Workplace

The South East Colorado Worksite Wellness Initiative, led by the Otero County Health Department, is hosting Health Links training in eight counties to develop worksite wellness leaders to support businesses in providing health and wellness services to employees.

### Physical Activity in Schools and Child-Care Settings

Blue Skies Exploration Academy in Colorado Springs participated in the "I am Moving, I am Learning" training program for its staff, including coordinated songs and movement such as yoga for kids. Blue Skies has extended some of the curriculum to parents. The state health department offers the training throughout Colorado to promote physical activity and play integration into child care curricula. State and local public health officials also provide support and professional development to schools and district staff on comprehensive physical activity and nutrition programs.







## Conclusion

People often think all Coloradans have active outdoor lifestyles, but data from the Colorado Health Report Card reveal that many are struggling to stay active and fit. Often, this reflects the obstacles they face because of where they live or factors such as income, gender and sexual orientation.

The public health community and local and state leaders are coalescing around the effort to increase physical activity statewide. With all of this momentum, Colorado is well-positioned to take home the gold.

# Definitions

Data from several different surveys were used for this report

| Indicator   | Age         | Data Source  |
|---|-------------|--|
|  <p>Percentage participating in 20+ minutes of vigorous physical activity (i.e., physical activity that makes them sweat and breathe hard) at least four days per week.</p>              | 6-17        | National Survey of Children's Health, 2011-12                                  |
|  <p>Percentage participating in vigorous physical activity that increases their heart rate and makes them breathe hard for 60+ minutes on 5+ days during the week before the survey.</p> | High School | Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System and Healthy Kids Colorado Survey, 2013 |
|  <p>Percentage participating in any physical activity within the past month.</p>   | 18-64       | Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2013                               |
|  <p>Percentage participating in any physical activity within the past month.</p>  | 65+         | Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2013                               |

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Physical Activity. <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/healthtopics/physactivity.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Callaghan P. (2004). Exercise: a neglected intervention in mental health care? J Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing. 2004;11:476-483 <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15255923>

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). How Much Physical Activity do Children Need? <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/children.html>

<sup>4</sup> Healthy Kids Colorado Survey Project. (2013). Sexual Orientation Overview of 2013 Data. <http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/PublicHealth/community/CEPEG/UnifYouth/Documents/SexualOrientation%20Overview.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Safe Routes to School National Partnership. Helpful Statistics on Safe Routes to School. <http://saferoutespartnership.org/resourcecenter/quick-facts>

<sup>6</sup> Data compiled by Community Commons. (2010) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network.

<sup>7</sup> Fillion, Roger. (2015). Picturing the New PE. Health Elevations. <http://www.coloradohealth.org/yellow.aspx?id=7216>

<sup>8</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2014). How Much Physical Activity Do you Need? <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/guidelines/index.html>

<sup>9</sup> Compiled by County Health Rankings using Business Analyst, Delorme map, ESRI, & US Census Tiger Files, 2010 & 2012. <http://www.county-healthrankings.org/rankings/data/CO>

<sup>10</sup> Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Healthy Colorado: Shaping a State of Health Colorado's Plan for Improving Public Health and the Environment 2015-2019. [https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/OPP\\_2015-CO-State-Plan.pdf](https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/OPP_2015-CO-State-Plan.pdf)

For more information about the 2015 Colorado Health Report Card, visit  
[www.ColoradoHealth.org/ReportCard](http://www.ColoradoHealth.org/ReportCard)