

New guidelines to support disabled children to be more active

- New guidelines to support disabled children and young people to be more active
- Guidelines advise 20 minutes of exercise per day and strength and balance activity 3 times a week
- Supports wider work to tackle health disparities across the UK helping everyone lead healthier, happier lives

Disabled children and young people will be supported to be more physically active following the publication of new guidelines from the UK Chief Medical Officers (CMOs).

The guidance, which recommends daily levels of physical activity, will support disabled children and young people to improve their physical and mental health throughout their lives.

The guidelines are underpinned by research from Durham University, University of Bristol and Disabilities Rights UK, and the infographic they are presented in is the first of its kind to be co-produced with disabled children, young people and their families.

The new guidelines recommend disabled children and young people:

- Undertake 120 to 180 minutes of aerobic physical activity per week at a moderate-to-vigorous intensity. This can be achieved in different ways (for example 20 minutes per day or 40 minutes 3 times per week) through activities such as walking or cycling.
- Complete challenging, but manageable, strength and balance activities 3 times per week which are particularly beneficial for muscle strength and motor skills. For example, indoor wall climbing, yoga, and modified sports such as basketball or football.
- When first starting to exercise, build up slowly to avoid injury
- Break down their exercise into bite-size chunks of physical activity throughout the day to make it more manageable

The UK Chief Medical Officers, Professor Sir Chris Whitty, Professor Sir Michael McBride, Professor Sir Gregor Smith and Sir Frank Atherton, said:

We are delighted to present this report and infographic which are an important step forward in addressing the gap in physical activity guidelines for disabled children and disabled young people.

We encourage schools, parents, carers and healthcare professionals to communicate and promote these guidelines across their wider

professional networks to enable appropriate physical activity opportunities for disabled children and disabled young people in their communities.

Regular physical activity has physical and mental health benefits for people of all ages. However, children and young people with disabilities are less likely to be active than non-disabled children, which can lead to health disparities, and these may widen as they become older.

The evidence found physical activity can be equally beneficial for disabled children and young people as non-disabled children, tackling misinformation about the risk. Ensuring children and young people, regardless of their disability status, are as physically active as possible is crucial to their health and wellbeing – both now and in the long-term.

Specific benefits that disabled children and young people can gain from physical activity include improved confidence and concentration, meeting new people and stronger muscles and improved motor strength.

Professor Brett Smith, Director of Research, Department of Sport and Exercise Sciences at Durham University, said:

The UK Chief Medical Officers' physical activity guidelines for disabled children and disabled young people are a UK first.

The scientific evidence is clear that physical activity is safe and has multiple health benefits for disabled children and disabled young people.

The infographic, that has been co-produced with over 250 disabled children and disabled young people, their parents and carers, aims to communicate these guidelines in an accessible and meaningful way.

Together, the guidelines and infographic are a vital stepping stone to improving the health and wellbeing of disabled children and disabled young people.

Dr Charlie Foster, Professor of Physical Activity and Public Health at the University of Bristol, said:

This process has shown me that public health messages will have more impact if they are co-created in genuine partnership with their target audience and users.

This is a vital lesson for all those tasked with tackling current public health challenges as our existing resources are not as relevant and may not speak to or for certain groups.

I'm most delighted that this infographic and the evidence review are accessible for all users and again this is another lesson learnt for our public health communities. My thanks to all those children, young people, careers and parents for making sure that this infographic speaks with and for them.

I look forward to taking this process into future development of public health resources and messages and see the impact of this work making physical activity more inclusive.

This guidance will support wider work by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) to get more children and young people physically active and tackle health inequalities.

Work already underway includes OHID working with stakeholders to update the National Physical Activity Framework and enable national and local action to support everyone to be more active.

Kamran Mallick, CEO of Disability Rights UK, said:

At Disability Rights UK we are really pleased to have worked with Durham University on the development of the UK Chief Medical Officers' physical activity guidelines for disabled children and young people.

This is an essential resource to demonstrate the health benefits disabled children and young people can achieve through regular physical activity.

Disabled people have a right to get active in ways that work for them, and these guidelines show how important this is. The evidence-based infographic is not only a highlight of the project but a positive example of co-production in practice.

Disabled children and young people, their parents and carers, health and social care professionals, and key disability and sports organisations have all been involved in co-producing the infographic. The final version results from their involvement and

input into this project.

Since 2013 the Department for Education has funded a series of grant programmes to increase and improve access to physical education, school sport and physical activity for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

This includes Inclusion 2024 which is helping pupils with SEND engage more in school sport, backed by £300,000 of government funding.