



Active School Curriculum

What is it?

The Australian Government is committed to increasing the levels of physical activity in primary and junior secondary school children leading to healthier, more active Australians. As part of the new conditions of funding under the Australian Government's schools funding legislation for 2005-2008, each state and territory and non-government education authority will be required to include in their curriculum at least two hours of physical activity each school week for primary and junior secondary school children.

Why is it needed?

Children who combine a balanced diet with regular activity will be happier, healthier and more ready to learn. Physical activity can play a major role in maintaining healthy body weight and reducing the chances of developing heart disease and diabetes. It also contributes to healthy bone development and has numerous substantial benefits in terms of social interaction, mental alertness and motor skills.

Some children are not spending as much time engaged in physical activity as children in previous generations. Recent studies suggest that about 40 per cent of children are missing out on outside school hours sporting activity. This is contributing to the fact that there are currently 1.5 million young people under the age of 18 in Australia who are either overweight or obese. Once children or adolescents are overweight, it is difficult for them to get back to a healthy weight.

What will it do?

The majority of children spend six hours per day in school for 40 weeks of the year between the age of 5 and 17 years. Schools are, therefore, well placed to provide children with the opportunity to be physically active. Many schools already do offer a range of physical activities. However, there are no national minimum requirements at present. Given the amount of time children spend at school it is important that they spend some of this time

doing physical activity and learning about the importance of daily exercise. Schools and teachers have enormous influence on children and have an important role to play in supporting parents in teaching children about healthy eating and exercise.

Opportunities for physical activity at school include: physical education (PE) classes; exercise and fitness programmes; and extra curricular sports. Access to school equipment, playgrounds and sporting fields will also encourage activity.

There will be a commonsense exemption policy for children who are unable to undertake any form of physical activity.

This initiative will also complement the government's new \$90 million *Active After-school Communities* programme, which will allow more than 150,000 children to participate in sports and other physical activities in a safe, secure and supervised environment after school.

When will it begin?

The government intends that these requirements will be implemented in all schools from Term 1 of 2005.

How do I get involved?

Whilst the government is requiring schools to increase physical activity, this is only part of the solution. It is important that these activities are positive experiences for children, to ensure that they are not discouraged at an early stage. Becoming involved yourself, by playing with your children outside of school hours will encourage them to be active, improve their coordination and skills, and further build their confidence.

Parents may wish to ask their child's school about their physical activity arrangements.

More information on this Australian Government initiative, as well as guidelines for children's physical activity can be found at www.healthyactive.gov.au.