

Kids under two should be 'screen free,' says American Academy of Pediatrics

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Globe and Mail Blog

Posted on Tuesday, October 18, 2011 12:24PM EDT

Kids two and younger should be “screen free” as much as possible and those exposed to excessive amounts of media may experience development problems, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.



The group first suggested limiting media use for children under two in 1999. Since then, screens have become ubiquitous and a body of evidence has emerged to support the AAP’s initial belief that the negative effects of media exposure outweighed the positive.

“More is known today about children’s early brain development, the best ways to help them learn, and the effects that various types of stimulation and activities have on this process,” [the group stated in a release](#).

In a new report released Tuesday and scheduled for publication next month in the journal *Pediatrics*, the group says that while many video programs are marketed as “educational,” there is no evidence to support that claim. “Quality programs are educational for children only if they understand the content and context of the video. Studies consistently find that children over two typically have this understanding,” reads the release.

More worrisome, the time at which children under two consume media and the amount they are exposed to it can also pose behavioural and development problems.

“Television around bedtime can cause poor sleep habits and irregular sleep schedules, which can adversely affect mood, behaviour and learning,” according to the group. As well, the report noted that, “Young children with heavy media use are at risk for delays in language development once they start school, but more research is needed as to the reasons.” It could be that parents who plunk their kids down in front of the TV for hours at a time aren’t that great at teaching them their ABC’s, but that isn’t to say the correlation shouldn’t be cause for concern.

[The Canadian Paediatric Society also notes](#) the many deleterious effects of media consumption on children, although it does not make age-specific recommendations for different age groups. Instead, it recommends limiting watching television to less than one to two hours per day.

Parents of toddlers need to turn off their TVs, say the AAP. Should they also put down their iPads? The new guidelines only refer to media watched passively on a screen; they do not refer to interactive play that a toddler might engage in with a smart phone, iPad or video game system. But Ari Brown, a pediatrician who helped write the new report, recommends parents be skeptical of claims made by

so-called educational apps, especially since studies on kids' use of touch screen devices are only now getting under way.

"I don't have a problem with touch screens, and they're not necessarily bad. But we need to understand how this affects kids," [he told Wired magazine](#).

Indeed we do, considering some kids already [expect all media to work like an iPad](#) interface.

But all things considered, it seems the AAP thinks it's better for your toddler to put away the iPad.

"Unstructured playtime is more valuable for the developing brain than any electronic media exposure," according to the report.