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## Children's fitness levels declining worldwide

By TRALEE PEARCE

*A new study out of the University of South Australia has found that on average, children take 90 seconds longer to run a mile than children did 30 years ago*



Children take part in a soccer practice on a public field in Toronto on Wednesday April 25, 2012.  
(Chris Young For The Globe and Mail)

They may be able to work your iPad faster than you ever could, but today's kids are actually moving slower than their parents did in their youth.

A new study out of the University of South Australia has found that on average, children take 90 seconds longer to run a mile than children did 30 years ago.

These findings were shared at an American Heart Association conference in Dallas on Tuesday and are reportedly the first to show that children's fitness and cardiovascular health have declined worldwide over the past three decades.

Exercise physiologist Dr. Grant Tomkinson and his colleagues analyzed 50 studies on running fitness involving 25 million children ages 9 to 17 in 28 countries from 1964 to 2010.

In looking at how far children could run in five to 15 minutes and how quickly they ran distances ranging from half a mile to two miles, Dr. Tomkinson discovered today's children are about 15 per cent less fit than their parents were at their age.

"If a young person is generally unfit now, then they are more likely to develop conditions like heart disease later in life," Dr. Tomkinson, a senior lecturer in the University of South Australia's School of Health Sciences, said in a statement.

The situation is so alarming here in Canada that this week, a coalition of more than 60 amateur and professional athletes, health experts, sports equipment purveyors and educators launched an initiative called Active at School.

As in many of the countries Dr. Tomkinson studied, public health guidelines recommend 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity a day for Canadian children.

According to research released this year, 90 per cent of Canadian children and youth do not get that much physical activity.

The coalition is seeking meetings with premiers, education and health ministers from all governments in Canada in the next 90 days to figure out how to get kids active in school for an hour a day.

Recent government statistics show that 14 per cent of five-year-olds meet the one-hour mark and the activity declines with age, falling to 3.5 per cent in the teen years.

Speaking at a launch event Monday in Toronto, physician and exercise advocate Dr. Mike Evans said despite advances in medicine and technology, the key to preventing or reducing the effects of many growing health problems such as cancer and diabetes is not new and shiny, but "old and probably dirty" – getting outside to run around and play.

*With reports from The Associated Press*