

Health Unit Media Release

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Take Me Outside & the Health Unit team up to encourage youth to: Play, Learn, and Grow Outside

Being a kid growing up today is much different than in past generations. Most of us remember playing outside all day long when we were children and not coming home until the street lights came on. Today's children and youth are spending much more time indoors in front of screens. **The 2011 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth reports that on average Canadian children are getting 6 hours of screen time per day on weekdays and over 7 hours on weekends.** Increased parental concerns about safety and supervision also play a role in the declining rates of outdoor play time.

As children's access to outdoor playtime decreases, there is a negative impact on the quality of children's lives mentally, physically, and spiritually. **For the first time in our history, today's generation of Canadian children have a shorter predicted life span than their parents' generation.** Rates of obesity and diabetes are reaching epidemic proportions. "There is a clear link between a child's connection with nature and his/her health" says Nicole Tobias, Public Health Nurse at the Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit. "When we keep children indoors, we are preventing them from having experiences necessary to play, learn, and discover new things about the world around them". Increased outdoor time can be directly connected to improved physical activity levels, higher academic achievement, decreased child injury rates, increased attention spans, positive social interaction and increased engagement at school, home and in the community.

In an effort to promote awareness of the benefits of outdoor play, the Health Unit is promoting the 'Take Me Outside' project founded by outdoor educator Colin Harris. Mr. Harris is running across Canada, stopping at schools along the way to encourage students to get outside, be active and connect with nature. **Colin started running in Newfoundland in January and on May 9-13 he will be visiting the Leeds, Grenville, and Lanark area.** Mr. Harris plans to visit several local schools to commend students on activities they are participating in outside. "We are really excited to welcome Mr. Harris to the tri-county area," exclaims Tobias. "Students and parents are looking forward to his visit and are preparing activities for his arrival. His message is an important one that is so simple – ***"go outside and play"***.

If you are interested in learning more about the project, visit: www.healthunit.org/physact or www.takemeoutside.ca

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