



**To:** Place Directorate

**From:** Adrian Davis

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**Subject:** Essential Evidence on a page: No. 176 Play Streets during school vacations

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Top line: The introduction of a Play Street, leading to a safe play space near home, is an effective intervention at neighbourhood level to increase urban children's moderate-to vigorous-intensity physical activity and decrease sedentary time during summer vacations.

Physical activity is associated with numerous health benefits in children. More sedentary time is related to negative health outcomes in 5- to 17-year-old children. Therefore, children are encouraged to engage at least in 60 minutes of daily moderate-to vigorous-intensity physical activity (MVPA) and to limit their sedentary time. Despite the health benefits of engaging in sufficient physical activity and limiting sedentary time, many children do not meet the physical activity guidelines and spend too much time sedentary.

Children's active outdoor play can significantly contribute to their MVPA, but compared to previous generations, children play less outside nowadays. Safety concerns (e.g. road safety, stranger danger) may cause parents to restrict their children to play outdoors. Therefore, interventions promoting children's active outdoor play, by providing safe places to play outside during leisure time are important and can be effective in increasing their overall physical activity and decreasing their sedentary time.

A Play Street is a street that is reserved for children's safe play for a specific period during school vacations, applied for by the residents for a set number of hours on a day and approved by the local authority. A Play Street near children's home could increase their MVPA and decrease their sedentary time. In a study Play Streets, a control group (no Play Street) was used to help determine the effects of Play Streets on children's MVPA and sedentary time in Ghent, Belgium.<sup>1</sup> The study sample consisted of 126 children (54 from Play streets, 72 from control streets). Children wore an accelerometer for 8 consecutive days and their parents filled out a questionnaire before and after the measurement period. During the intervention, streets were enclosed and reserved for children's play.

Positive intervention effects were found for MVPA and sedentary time between 14h00 and 19h00, and during the entire day. Between 14h00 and 19h00 children's MVPA in the Play Streets group increased from 27 minutes/day during normal conditions to 36 minutes/day during the Play Street intervention, whereas MVPA in the control children decreased from 27 to 24 minutes/day. During the entire day, children's MVPA in the Play Streets group increased from 55 minutes/day to 67 minutes/day, whereas MVPA in the control children decreased from 57 minutes/day to 53 minutes/day. This indicates that children did not compensate for their increased MVPA during the intervention period during the rest of the day, as they engaged in more MVPA during the entire intervention day.

Play Streets offer children a safe play space to be active in their own neighbourhood. By organising Play Streets, the neighbourhood environment (e.g. creating a car-free play place) and the social environment (e.g. increased social interaction between children playing in the street) are targeted.

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<sup>1</sup> D'Haese, S., et al 2015. Organising "Play Streets" during school vacations can increase physical activity and decrease sedentary time in children, *International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 12:14 Open Access.