

Results from Colombia's 2018 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

Silvia A. González, Camilo A. Triana, Catalina Abaunza, Laura Aldana, Luis F. Arias-Gómez, Jhael Bermúdez, Diana Marina Camargo Lemos, Juan Camilo Cuya, Daniel D. Cohen, Jorge Enrique Correa-Bautista, Iván D. Escobar, Karen Lorena Fajardo, Johnattan García, Rocio Gámez, Julia Andrea Gómez, Yaneth Herazo Beltrán, María Jose Lizarazo, Oscar Lozano, Paola Andrea Martínez, Mercedes Mora, Diana C. Páez, Robinson Ramírez-Vélez, María Isabel Rodríguez, Nubia Ruiz, Gustavo Tovar, Julieth Pilar Uriza, and Olga L. Sarmiento

Introduction

Physical activity (PA) promotion across the lifespan is a key strategy for the prevention of non-communicable diseases in the public health agenda in Colombia.¹ However, the sparse national data available before 2015 indicated that PA levels among Colombian adolescents were low and sedentary behaviors were highly prevalent.² As a result of the improvement in national surveillance, Colombia has national data on PA-related indicators for all ages between 5 and 17 years, for the first time. These data informed the third version of the Report Card on Physical Activity (Figure 1). The purpose of this article is to summarize the methodology and results of the Colombian 2018 Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth.

Methods

The 2018 Report Card was informed by the best and most recent evidence available from national surveys, peer-reviewed literature, policy documents and government reports, covering the period between 2010 to 2018. The primary data source was the 2015-2016 National Survey of Nutrition (ENSIN).³ Additionally, relevant evidence from local studies was included in the final report.

The evidence was summarized in 12 indicators grouped in three categories: Daily behaviors (Overall PA, Organized Sport and PA, Active Play, Active Transportation, Sedentary Behavior, Sleep), settings and sources of influence (Family and Peers, School, Community and Environment, Government) and health outcomes (Physical Fitness and Overweight). This article is focused on the 10 core indicators included in the Global Matrix 3.0.⁴

The development of the Report Card involved a research team and a group of national experts from multiple sectors. The research team conducted the literature review and summarized the evidence.



Figure 1 — Colombia's 2018 Report Card cover.

González, Triana, Aldana, Arias-Gómez, Cuya, Fajardo, Gómez, Lizarazo, Martínez, Páez and Sarmiento are with the School of Medicine, Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, Colombia. González is also with the Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group, Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Abaunza and Uriza are with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Colombia, Bogotá, Colombia. Bermúdez is with the Colombian Family Welfare Institute, Bogotá, Colombia. Camargo is with the School of Physical Therapy, Faculty of Health, Universidad Industrial de Santander, Bucaramanga, Colombia. Cohen is with the Faculty of Life Sciences, Universidad de Santander (UDES), and Fundación Oftalmológica de Santander, Bucaramanga, Colombia. Correa-Bautista and Ramírez-Vélez are with the Center of Studies in Physical Activity Measurements (CEMA Group), School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universidad del Rosario, Bogotá, Colombia. Escobar is with the Colombian Foundation of Obesity Funcobes, Bogotá, Colombia. García is with the Takemi Program in International Health, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Boston, United States. Gámez is with Muévete Bogotá Program, Sports Area, District Institute of Recreation and Sports, Bogotá Government, Bogotá, Colombia. Herazo is with the Physiotherapy Program, School of Health Sciences, Universidad Simón Bolívar, Barranquilla, Colombia. Lozano and Ruiz are with Physical Activity Group Division, Coldeportes, Bogotá, Colombia. Mora is with the Nutrition and Biochemistry Department, Faculty of Sciences, Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, Colombia. Rodríguez is with the Division of Students Welfare, Education Secretary, Bogotá Government, Bogotá, Colombia. Tovar is with the School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universidad del Rosario, Bogotá, Colombia. González (sgonzalez@cheo.on.ca) is the corresponding author.

Table 1 Grades and Rationales for Colombia's 2018 Report Card

Indicator	Grade ^a	Rationale
Overall Physical Activity ^b	D+	35.5% of Colombian children between 6 and 17 years were physically active for at least 60 daily minutes during 4 or more days per week. ³ The prevalence ranges from 26% among adolescents aged 13 to 17 years to 42% among school age children (6-12 years). Only 23.7% children and adolescents were active everyday during the last week. ³
Organized Sport and Physical Activity	C	49.2% of children and youth reported participating in organized sport and/or PA programs in the previous week. ³
Active Play	INC	No national data are available for the age groups included in the Global Matrix 3.0.
Active Transportation	B	71.7% of children and youth in Colombia reported walking or biking as their main mode of transport to or from school in the previous week. ³
Sedentary Behaviors ^b	D+	38.1% of children and adolescents aged 5 to 17 years spent 2 hours or less of recreational screen time per day. ³ This prevalence ranged from 27.5% among adolescents (13 to 17 years old) to 44.1% among children between 5 to 12 years. ³
Physical Fitness ^b	D-	The average percentile achieved by Colombian children (9-17 years old) for handgrip strength was 25 according to the norm values proposed by Tomkinson et al. ⁵ When examining the percentage of children above the 20th percentile, 49.1% of boys and 48.7% of girls are over the low fitness level. ³
Family and Peers	INC	According to ENSIN 2015, 51.3% of the adults in Colombia met the World Health Organization PA guidelines. ³ Nevertheless, the group of experts considered the available data insufficient to assign a grade to this indicator.
School	D	According to ENSIN data, 81.4% of Colombian adolescents reported attending Physical Education class one day per week. ³ The grade was assigned considering that none of the adolescents reported PE more than one day per week and that almost 20% of children did not receive PE class in the week prior to the survey, despite it being mandatory. ^{6,7} This question was only applied to children who attended school in the week prior to the survey. Additionally, 47.9% of adolescents reported attending PA programs in the school setting during the last month. ³
Community and Environment	B-	According to ENSIN 2015, 63.8% of children and youth in Colombia live in a neighbourhood with a park, green spaces, recreational centers or sport facilities where they can play. ³ Among these, 74.2% perceive that these environments are safe. ³ Regarding Ciclovías participation, 7.7% of the children and youth reported attending Ciclovía during the last month, and 20.4% of adolescents reported participating in other PA programs at the community level. ³ According to reports of the Administrative Department of Sports (Coldeportes), the National Program of Healthy Habits and Lifestyles is currently being implemented in all the departments in Colombia ⁸ and there are 67 regular Ciclovía programs in the country. ⁹
Government	B	A National Policy for the development of sports, recreation, PA and leisure time in Colombia was released for the period 2017-2027. ¹⁰ This policy aims to articulate the policies at the local levels, with the national policies, and establishes specific strategies and goals regarding sports participation, recreational activities and school-based initiatives for the mid and long-term. Additionally, PA has been included for the first time in the National Dietary Guidelines, as an essential component for health promotion and the prevention of non-communicable diseases. ¹¹ Regarding active transportation, the Law 1811 of 2016 was created to promote cycling and walking as main modes of transport. This Law establishes incentives and regulations for active transport at the national level. ¹² The Ministry of Health has also implemented actions to promote PA at the individual and community levels, with a special focus on rural areas. Despite the increase in policies, only 0.23% of the National Budget is earmarked for the Sports Sector in 2018. However, the specific budget for PA promotion among children will be significantly lower. Other policies that support and regulate PA among children include: The Ten-Year Plan of Sports, Recreation, Physical Education and Physical Activity, the Law 1355 of 2009, The Ten-Year Plan of Public Health, National Plan of Food Security and the Early Years Policy (De 0 a Siempre). There is an absence of policies or strategies aiming to reduce sedentary behaviors in Colombia.

^a The Colombian Report Card document uses numerical grades equivalent to the academic grading system used in most of the schools in Colombia. The equivalents used for the Colombian Report Card document are A = 5, B = 4, C = 3, D = 2, F = 1.

^b The results for these indicators in the Colombian Report Card document differ from those reported in this article and in the Global Matrix 3.0, due to the use of country-specific benchmarks.

The group of experts knowledge complemented the literature, and assessed the current situation of the country, assigning a grade to each indicator. Grades were based on common benchmarks and a standardized grading rubric defined by the Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance.⁴

Results and Discussion

Table 1 summarizes the grades assigned by the group of experts with the corresponding rationale for each grade.

Only 3 out of 10 Colombian children are achieving the recommended levels of PA, while 6 out of 10 spend excessive

time in screens. These behaviors coincide with the high proportion of children observed with a low fitness level. Active transportation is a highly prevalent behavior and is important to advocate for conditions that contribute to maintain or even increase the use of active modes. The country still needs to improve PA promotion in the school setting and maintain the actions at the community level. As in previous years, there is a broad policy framework, but there is a lack of evaluation to document its impact. Active play in children over 5 years and influence of family and peers are main research gaps, needed to be addressed in the future to improve the understanding of the PA situation in Colombian children.

Conclusion

Only a third of the children and youth population in Colombia are enjoying the physical, social and cognitive benefits of being active. Higher involvement of the education sector, as well as the implementation of sustainable programs and policies, are required to contribute to spreading the benefits of PA across all Colombian children and youth.

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