

2. NON-MEDICAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

2.4. Physical activity among children

Undertaking physical activity in adolescence is beneficial for health, and can set standards for adult physical activity levels, thereby influencing health outcomes later in life. Research suggests that physical activity has a role in child and adolescent development, learning and well-being, and in the prevention and treatment of a range of youth health issues including asthma, mental health, and bone health. More direct links to adult health are found between physical activity in adolescence and its effect on overweight and obesity and related diseases, breast cancer rates and bone health in later life. The health effects of adolescent physical activity are sometimes dependent on the activity type, e.g. water physical activities in adolescence are effective in the treatment of asthma, and exercise is recommended in the treatment of cystic fibrosis (Hallal et al., 2006; Currie et al., 2012).

A large study recommends that children participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily, although evidence suggests that many children do not meet these guidelines (Strong et al., 2005; Borraccino et al., 2009; Hallal et al., 2012). Some of the factors influencing the levels of physical activity undertaken by adolescents include the availability of space and equipment, children's present health conditions, their school curricula and other competing pastimes.

In OECD countries, fewer than one in four children report that they undertake moderate-to-vigorous exercise regularly, according to results from the 2009-10 HBSC survey (Figure 2.4.1). At age 11, Austria, Ireland, Spain, and Finland stand out as strong performers with over 30% of children reporting exercising for at least 60 minutes per day over the past week. At age 15, children in the United States are the most active, followed by Ireland, Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic and Canada. Children in Denmark, France, Italy, and Switzerland were least likely to report exercising regularly. Italy ranks at the bottom end of the spectrum for both boys and girls, and at both ages. A consistently higher proportion of boys than girls reported undertaking physical activity, whether moderate or vigorous, across all countries and all age groups (Figure 2.4.1).

It is of concern that physical activity tends to fall between ages 11 to 15 in almost all OECD countries, with boys in Italy and in the United States the only exceptions. In Austria, Finland, Norway and Germany, the rate of boys exercising at recommended levels is reduced by half between age 11 and age 15. This is also the case for girls in many countries. In Austria, Ireland, Spain and Finland, rates of physical activity among girls fall by over 60%.

The change in activity levels between age 11 and age 15 may reflect a move to different types of activity, since free play is more common among younger children, and structured activities at school or in sports clubs become more common later. Boys tend to be more physically active than girls in all countries, also suggesting that the opportunities to undertake physical activity may be gender-biased (Currie et al., 2012).

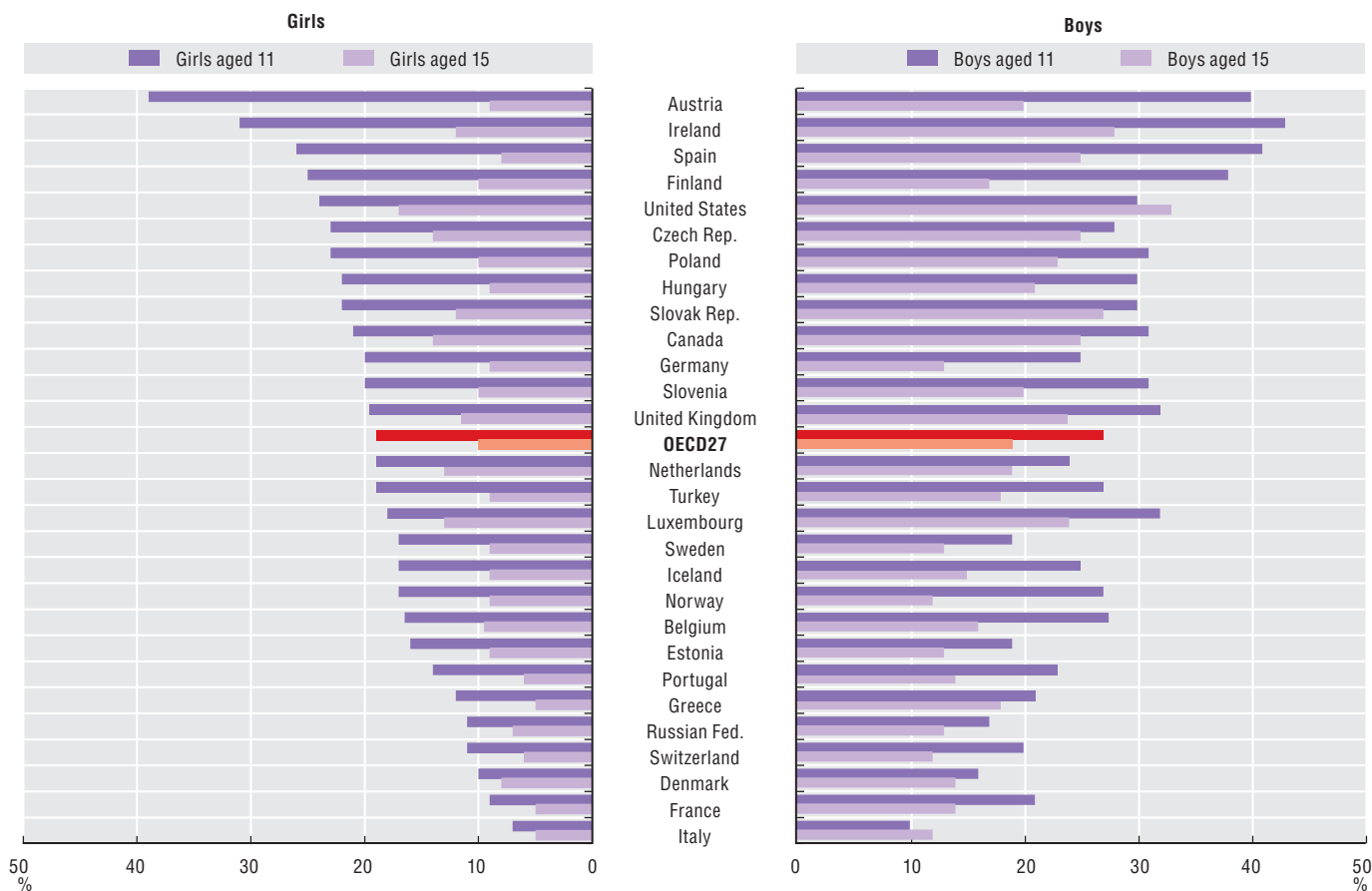
On average across OECD countries, daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity fell slightly for both boys and girls, and in all age groups between 2005-06 and 2009-10 as shown in Figure 2.4.2.

Definition and comparability

Data for physical activity consider the regularity of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity as reported by 11-, 13- and 15-year-olds in 2005-06 and 2009-10. Moderate-to-vigorous physical activity refers to exercise undertaken for at least an hour each day which increases the heart rate, and leaves the child out of breath sometimes.

Data for OECD countries are from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) surveys. They are drawn from school-based samples of 1 500 in each age group in most countries.

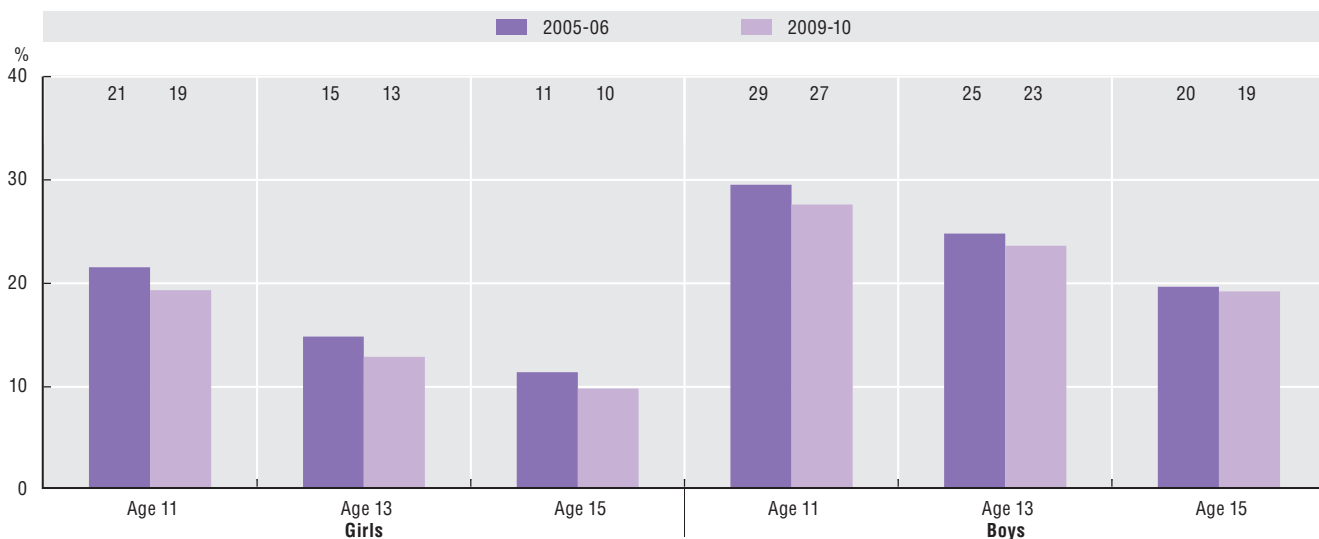
2.4.1. Daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity, 11- and 15-year-olds, 2009-10



Source: Currie et al. (2012).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932916572>

2.4.2. Trends in daily moderate-to-vigorous physical activity, 27 OECD countries, 2005-06 to 2009-10



Source: Currie et al. (2008); Currie et al. (2012).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932916591>



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