

Terminology for Active Living Research

February 2009 version

- **Active living** is a way of life that integrates physical activity into daily routines. Individuals may do this in a variety of ways, such as walking or bicycling for transportation, exercise or pleasure; playing in the park; working in the yard; taking the stairs; and using recreation facilities. The goal for children and adolescents is to accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous activity each day, and the goal for adults is 30 minutes per day. This level of physical activity promotes energy balance needed to maintain healthy weight and improves physical and mental health.
- **Built environment** refers to all buildings, spaces and products that are created, or modified, by people. It includes homes, schools, workplaces, parks/recreation areas, greenways, shopping areas and transportation systems. The built environment is affected by land-use and transportation planning and policies in urban, rural and suburban areas. These environments and the policies that govern them affect opportunities for physical activity for recreation and transportation purposes. Built environment changes of particular relevance to youth include park development and renovations, installations of playgrounds in apartment complexes, improvements to playground equipment or school activity facilities, traffic calming, and improvements to sidewalks and crosswalks.
- **Environmental interventions** involve: 1) changing physical surroundings or settings; 2) changing access to or availability of foods, physical activities, or sedentary behaviors; or 3) changing a publicly-accessible information environment about physical activity or dietary behavior (in contrast to information presented to small groups or classes). Examples of environmental interventions include building sidewalks, adding a salad bar to the school cafeteria, removing televisions from day care settings, opening gates so children can use playgrounds after school, increasing stock of fresh fruits and vegetables in corner stores, signs promoting stair use, menu labeling.
- **Food environments** refer to a child's physical environment, such as child care, school, after-school programs, and food outlets (e.g., corner stores, grocery stores, restaurants) where children and their families make food purchases and food decisions. These environments influence children's food choices and intake through food access, availability, characteristics (e.g., energy density and portion size) and promotion (e.g., price, placement and packaging). These environments are affected by broader **macro-level influences and policies**, such as food marketing, government regulations, agricultural policies, and market and economic factors.
- **Health impact assessment (HIA)** evaluates a policy, program or project for its potential effects on the health of a population and the distribution of those effects within the populations. Decisions likely to affect physical activity levels are made in many sectors of society, but it is rare for decision-makers to consider physical activity outcomes.
- **Healthy eating** refers to eating the recommended types and amounts of foods, nutrients and calories recommended in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, while limiting low-nutrient, high-fat and high-sugar foods and beverages to promote health and achieve and maintain an optimum body weight and energy balance. Healthy eating covers the consumption of healthy foods and beverages.
- **Macro-level policies and strategies** are considered "up-stream" factors that work at the highest levels of influence and have impact at multiple levels (e.g., state, community, school, and home) and affect large populations. Some examples of macro-level policies include transportation and land use land-use policies, crime control practices, preschool licensing and school wellness policies at the state and federal level.
- **Natural experiments** are opportunistic studies that evaluate changes in real-world environments or policies and include pre- and post-assessments. In many natural experiments, researchers cannot control the allocation of an intervention to particular groups or communities, but naturally occurring or

pre-determined variations in policy or environmental change can be evaluated with quasi-experimental designs.

- **Physical activity environments** refer to places where children or teens can be physically active, such as homes; child-care, school and after-school settings; public and private recreation facilities; youth sports locations; sidewalks and trails; neighborhoods; and recreational settings where children and their families walk, bike and play.
- **Physical activity policies** refer to regulations, laws, policy-making actions or formal or informal rules established by organizations or government units that can affect physical activity. Policies affecting zoning, land use, recreation facilities, transportation, and crime and traffic safety can alter youth access to safe places to walk, bike and play (e.g., parks, playgrounds, sidewalks) for recreation and transportation purposes. Policies can affect access or quality of youth physical activity programs, including school physical education, recess, after-school programs, youth sports, promotion of active commuting to school, and costs of community recreational programs. There is a grid listing policies of interest for a variety of physical activity environments at www.activelivingresearch.org.
- **Policies** refer to regulations, laws, policy-making actions or formal or informal rules established by formal organizations or government units. Policies of most interest are those that influence the food or built environments and those that shape, guide, or alter incentives for children's eating, physical activity, or sedentary behaviors.
- **Physical activity policy interventions** may or may not be intended to affect physical activity, sedentary behavior, or body weight. Examples would include policies that affect the reach or efficacy of programs, such as a requirement that at least 50 percent of physical education class time is spent being physically active; alter economic incentives, such as sliding-scale fees for youth recreation programs or subsidies for purchasing active computer games; lead to changes in physical environments, such as restricting television viewing in day care; provide more funding for parks or Safe Routes to Schools.
- **Sedentary behaviors** require energy expenditure similar to a resting state. Common sedentary behaviors are watching television or DVDs, playing inactive computer games, and using the internet for recreation. Excessive time in sedentary behaviors is a risk factor for childhood obesity, and reductions in non-academic sedentary behaviors have been recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics and Healthy People 2010.

Additional terms can be found in glossary in:

- Transportation Research Board Special Report 282: Does the built environment influence physical activity? Examining the evidence. *Transportation Research Board and Institute of Medicine Summary Report* 2005. www.trb.org