



In the June 2009 issue of *Pediatrics*, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) issued its first policy statement addressing the role environment plays in childhood overweight. The article, titled: “The Built Environment: Designing Communities to Promote Physical Activity in Children,” outlines recommendations that pediatricians and government should take to improve community access to physical activity opportunities for America’s children.

The Problem

An estimated 32 percent of American children are overweight and at risk for heart disease, diabetes and certain cancers. Physical inactivity contributes to this high prevalence of overweight. The AAP recommends children be physically active for at least 60 minutes each day.

A Key Culprit – Communities Hostile to Physical Activity

Certain aspects of the environment, such as the physical layout of communities, can promote or limit physical activity. A pediatrician’s recommendation that a patient get regular physical activity isn’t likely to be followed if the patient’s everyday world lacks safe and convenient opportunities to walk, play or run.

Some examples of how communities can support active living:

- Increase access to school grounds during after-school hours
- Increase access to parks and recreational facilities
- Design communities that are less car dependent and make existing communities more dense, making it easier for people to walk or bike to destinations of daily life
- Implement “traffic-calming” strategies to slow driver speed and decrease traffic danger

Key Recommendations

Recommendations for Pediatricians

- Ask patients and families about opportunities for physical activity at nearby school grounds, parks, playgrounds or open spaces.
- Identify barriers that could be preventing children from using community locations and offer suggestions, when possible.

Recommendations for Government

- Create and maintain public spaces within communities as well as the means to access them safely.
- Prioritize resources to low-income neighborhoods to ensure that all children and adolescents have access to safe and desirable opportunities for play and active lifestyles.

American Academy of Pediatrics The AAP is an organization of 60,000 pediatricians committed to the attainment of optimal physical, mental, and social health and well-being for all infants, children, adolescents, and young adults. “The Built Environment: Designing Communities to Promote Physical Activity in Children” appeared in the June 2009 issue of *Pediatrics*®, the flagship journal of the AAP and can be accessed at <http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/pediatrics;123/6/1591.pdf>.

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What is Joint Use?

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Joint use is a way to increase opportunities for the community to be more physically active. It refers to two or more entities – usually a school and a city or nonprofit organization – sharing indoor and outdoor spaces. The concept is simple: share resources to keep costs down and communities healthy.

Examples of Joint Use Partnerships:

- A principal unlocks the school gate after hours so neighbors can play basketball, run on the track or just play outdoors on evenings and weekends.
- A school opens its soccer field to a local league for weekend games.
- A YMCA opens its gym to the local PE teacher so students have a place to exercise.

Why is Joint Use Needed?

Physical activity can help prevent obesity and improve health, yet certain environments make being active harder instead of easier. Experts now know that where we live, work and play — the physical environment itself — determines, to a large degree, whether we will be healthy.

Too often, kids find school gates closed after hours, locking them out of opportunities to be active. Closing off recreational facilities after school leaves many children and families struggling to incorporate physical activity into their daily routines. Joint use agreements make physical activity easier by providing communities with safe, conveniently located and inviting places to exercise and play.

Where is Joint Use Happening?

Joint use is happening in cities throughout California and across the nation. California has policies to encourage or require schools to make facilities open to the public, but thousands still do not.

How Does Joint Use Work?

Joint use agreements facilitate a partnership between school districts and local governments or private organizations to open up spaces such as playgrounds, athletic fields, pools, and gymnasiums to the community outside of school hours or to open up community facilities to schools at a reduced cost or for free.

Joint use partnerships can be formal or informal, but formal agreements offer increased protections for both the facility and the community group using the facility. Formal joint use agreements can successfully address issues of maintenance, operations, liability, ownership and cost.

Potential Barriers to Joint Use

Some may be hesitant to engage in joint use due to unfounded concerns. Following are key concerns and how different communities across the state have successfully responded to them:

- **Maintenance** – Joint use agreements can help ensure that school properties are respected and maintained. When the community shares school resources, they take pride and ownership in the space, which can help deter vandalism.
- **Operations** – In some cases, school employees come a little early or stay a little later to unlock gates. In other cases, this service is performed by volunteers.
- **Liability** – Experts say most schools' existing liability insurance is sufficient to cover any liability issues associated with joint use.
- **Ownership** – Joint use agreements can outline a process for resolving any conflicts that may surface about how decisions are made about the property.
- **Cost** – Joint use agreements build upon assets a community already has. Sharing existing space is cheaper and more efficient than duplicating the same facilities in other parts of the community.

Visit www.jointuse.org for sources and more information.



Joint Use and Health

The way a community is designed affects how healthy we are. Our surroundings influence the quality of the food we eat, how much exercise we get, and our quality of life. Joint use – the sharing of space between schools and communities – improves people’s chances of being healthy by making it easier for them to be physically active. Joint use provides kids and adults with safe, conveniently located places to exercise and play.

Physical activity is a strong determinant of health, but most Americans don’t get the exercise they need to be healthy.

- Approximately 65 percent of U.S. children do not get the recommended amount of physical activity. Twenty-five percent are physically inactive.¹
- More than half of California children do not get the recommended amount of physical activity.²
- 61.5 percent of children aged 9-13 years do not participate in any organized physical activity during their nonschool hours and 22.6 percent do not engage in any free-time physical activity.³
- 65 percent of U.S. high school students did not meet recommended levels of physical activity.⁴
- In California, one million teens (29 percent) do not get recommended levels of physical activity.⁴
- In California, one in four teens do not have access to a safe park near home.⁴
- In Southern California, about 86 percent of residents (adults and kids) do not have easy access to open spaces such as parks.⁴
- Although parents generally perceived the same barriers to participation in physical activities regardless of the child’s sex and age, concerns about transportation, opportunities in their area, and expense were reported significantly more often by African American and Latino parents than by white parents.⁵

Inactivity and related health problems are linked to the way our communities are designed.

- People who have parks nearby exercise 38 percent more than those who do not have easy access.⁴
- Lower-income communities, including predominantly Latino and African American communities, often have fewer resources to support active lifestyles and public places to play. These communities typically have less park space and are less likely to have houses with private backyards.⁴

Joint use partnerships between school districts and local governments or organizations can allow community members and groups to use playgrounds, athletic fields, pools, gymnasiums and other recreational facilities after school hours. Joint use partnerships can also be used to open up community facilities to schools at a reduced cost or for free.

This increases the opportunities kids and adults have to be active, which, combined with good nutrition, is an important step toward improving health.

1 CDC. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance—United States, 2007 [pdf 1M]. Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report 2008;57 (No.SS-4).

2 A Special Report on Policy Implications from the 1999 California Children’s Healthy Eating and Exercise Practices Survey, 2002.

3 <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/cpns/Documents/CPNS-REU-PolicyReport72502.pdf>.

3 CDC. Youth Media Campaign Longitudinal Survey, 2002.

4 “Addressing The Crisis of Overweight Children.” www.jointuse.org.

5 CDC. Youth Media Campaign Longitudinal Survey, 2002.

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Making It Work

Joint use is happening in cities throughout California and across the nation. California has policies to encourage or require schools to make facilities open to the public, but thousands still do not. The following are some examples of successful joint use partnerships:

Claremont

City and school district share facilities

Danville

New swimming pool for high school and community use

El Dorado Hills

Community and school district share facilities

Escalon

City and school district share swimming pool

Fresno

Share city and park recreation grounds

La Mesa

Improve a school park for public use and operate a teen center on school grounds

Los Gatos

Swimming pool on school grounds open to community

San Carlos

City and school district share recreational facilities

San Luis Obispo

City and school district share facilities and provide programs

Santa Ana

Community and school district share baseball fields, high school facilities open to community and operate park and playground programs on school grounds

Temecula

Community and school district share recreational facilities

Vallejo

School district and recreational district share facilities

Vista

City and school district share facilities

Watsonville

School facility open to community

West Sacramento

City and school district share use of and cost for new facilities

Visit www.jointuse.org for sources and more information.



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