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The Effect of Environment on Adolescents' Physical Activity: Findings from the 2003 California Health Interview Survey

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Access to recreational facilities such as parks and activity-friendly school environments are two factors that can influence individuals' physical activity. Using data from the 2003 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS 2003), we examined the relationship between adolescents' levels of physical activity and whether they reported having access to a safe park or open space and whether their school requires physical education (PE). The percentage of adolescents who were physically inactivity was higher among adolescents who have no access to a safe recreational area (10.3%) than among those with access to a safe park or open space (6.4%, $p < 0.05$).

Level of physical activity also varied with PE requirements. The prevalence of regular physical activity was higher among adolescents whose schools require PE (73.0%) than among those whose schools do not require PE (59.5%, $p < 0.001$); and the prevalence of physical inactivity was nearly twice as high among adolescents whose schools do not require PE (11.7% vs. 6.2%, $p < 0.01$).

In multivariable analyses, requiring PE is related to both higher prevalence of regular physical activity and lower prevalence of no physical activity. Having access to a safe park or open space is associated with lower rates of no physical activity, although it was not associated with rates of regular physical activity.

These findings suggest that efforts to encourage adolescents' participation in physical activity should include strategies to enhance access to safe parks and open spaces and to ensure that physical education is offered and required at school.

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