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**Inactivity time-bomb caused by lazy summer holidays, new research suggests**

British schoolchildren are losing 80 per cent of fitness gained during term time through ‘lazy summer holidays,’ new research from ukactive has revealed.

The new testing methods developed by ukactive Research Institute alongside Premier Sport, the country's leading provider of sports provision in schools, were aimed at providing a much more accurate measure of children’s fitness than the BMI alone, in a bid to help schools deliver a more informed view of health and fitness levels.

Children taking part in a new fitness measurement programme were able to run a further 120 metres in July – before the summer break – than in the same test in September, suggesting that term-time improvements in physical activity were being eroded by sedentary school breaks.

Children completed an average of 740 metres of a shuttle run test ahead of the summer holidays compared with 605 metres at the start of the new term.

The rate of increase in children’s BMI also increased by two and a half times during the summer break, rising from an average of 17.64 in the spring to 18.26 in September.

The research, which was carried out with more than 400 children in 14 schools over a 13 month period, was the first study of its kind to measure fitness levels both before and after the summer holidays.

The study’s authors claim that the government’s recent promise of a £500m cash-injection into school sport through the sugar levy should also be used to provide incentives for children and parents to be active over the summer, where action is needed.

Previous research from ukactive has highlighted that nine in ten British parents fear that smartphone and tablet use has made it more difficult to encourage children to lead healthy lifestyles during school breaks, whereas 53 per cent of parents do not think that there are enough affordable opportunities for families to be active together during school holidays.

The ukactive Research Institute – who carried out the programme using the My Personal Best Challenge developed by children’s activity provider Premier Sport – presented the findings to the annual American College of Sport Medicine conference last month.

The study showed that children who attended schools where Premier Sport delivered regular sporting activities had a more limited increase in BMI and a much slower fitness drop-off during the summer holidays.

Previous research has indicated that half of seven year olds in the UK do not meet the Chief Medical Officer’s minimum physical activity guidelines, creating a ‘ticking time-bomb’ of health issues in future years.

ukactive Chair Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson [has previously called for](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-33135160) the government to include measures of cardiorespiratory fitness to the Child Weight Measurement programme as a first step to fix the problem, stating that we should focus on the ‘health of our hearts, not just the size of our waists.’

This new research – which points to the feasibility and scalability of physical activity measurements in schools – should be used by headteachers and the education sector to fully explore the potential to introduce evidence-based cardio-respiratory testing in schools.

**Dr Steven Mann, ukactive Research Director and lead author said:**

“The research we are presenting shows for the first time that the inactivity problem in the UK stems from an inactive summer time.

"Schools and activity providers are doing a fantastic job to increase fitness levels during term time, but the evidence shows that we need to focus our efforts on ensuring that the summer months are active months for all children.

"We’re enjoying an incredible summer of sport with the Euros and the Olympic and Paralympic Games, but the reality is that this is not translating into more active children."

**Chief Executive of Premier Sport, David Batch said:**

"This scientific evidence means we can be much smarter when we invest in children's fitness, using meaningful and measurable interventions to drive improvement”

"One of the key findings was that this measurement is entirely scalable and as a result, central government, local authorities, school governors, headteachers and individual class teachers can now finally use evidence to base their investment decisions upon".

"A larger study is already underway funded by Public Health Islington and Public Health Camden, but we must use this information to progress from simply spending more money just to return children to their starting point each academic year".

**Olympic gold medallist and Premier Sport ambassador, Duncan Goodhew said:**

**“**It doesn’t seem right that we regularly measure numeracy and literacy skills in school children but we don’t regularly measure something that could potentially kill them! This has to change if we’re to curve the alarming rates of inactivity in our children.”

(Ends)

**Notes to editors –**

**To see full details of the research abstract and further details on the research, please click** [**here**](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/459wicxgq5st066/AADvttsujV7X_Dyy5yHMHJeIa?dl=0)

**For more information about ukactive or to arrange an interview, please contact Stan Jackson on 077 477 18279 or email to: stanjackson@ukactive.org.uk**

**About the Research**

The ukactive Research Institute measured the Cardiorespiratory Fitness of over 400 schoolchildren from 14 schools in the North West of England during the 2014/15 academic year, using the Premier Sport My Personal Best Challenge.

The primary purpose of this investigation was to examine the CRF of children at a number of UK primary schools over one academic year. Measures were CRF and body mass index (BMI). Secondary aims were to test the feasibility of CRF testing in primary schools more generally (previous studies have been administered by research teams, and whilst providing useful data relating to validity and reliability, provide little insight into the practicality and scalability of testing).

Delivered through two classes, one at the beginning of the school year and one at the end, the programme offers a fun and exciting way for children to learn about physical fitness, measure their own fitness levels and track their progress over time.

**The research, which tracked children’s cardio-respiratory fitness (CRF) using V02 Max, found that children’s fitness increased from 49.58 to 51.58 during the first quarter of the academic year, and continued to rise throughout the school year, before decreasing dramatically over the summer holidays to 49.99**

The research was presented to the American College of Sports Medicine in late May 2016

**About Premier Sport**

Premier Sport is the UK's largest children's coaching company of its kind, successfully delivering more than 25,000 sport and physical activity sessions every month. Premier Sport supports teachers in their curriculum delivery and provides parents with an invaluable service before, during, afterschool and during holiday periods.

Premier Sport delivers regular provision to 12 per cent of UK Primary Schools which includes:

* More than 6 million curricular visits
* Over 1 million kids in school clubs
* Half a million kids in lunchtime clubs

Of the schools which took part in the personal best programme:

* 100 per cent of schools want to do the scheme again
* 100 per cent of parents wanted their children to take part
* 422 of the 423 children said they wanted to do it again

**About ukactive**

ukactive is the UK’s leading not-for-profit health body for the physical activity sector, with over 3,500 members from activity providers to major consumer brands, training facilities and equipment manufacturers. Members come from across the private, public and third sector and are united by ukactive’s longstanding and uncompromising commitment to getting more people, more active, more often.

ukactive facilitates big impact partnerships, conceives and drives breakthrough campaigns, conducts critical research and galvanises key stakeholders to develop and deliver key projects that support and champion the physical activity agenda. The organisation’s efforts are centred on supporting a national ambition to “Turn the tide of physical inactivity”.

Figure 1- CRF and BMI throughout academic year