

# Salud America!

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Research  
Network to Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children

## ISSUE BRIEF

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## Active Play and Latino Kids

### Introduction

Physical activity, or “active play,” is critical for maintaining a healthy weight, yet studies suggest that Latino kids may have fewer opportunities to engage in physical activity than their White peers.

Latino kids are less likely than White kids to meet federal recommendations of at least 60 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per day. Latino kids may be less active because they tend to live in areas with fewer parks and other active spaces, or have fewer school- or community-based physical activity programs during or after school. Latino parental practices also may contribute.

Targeting these factors may help young Latinos—who are expected to comprise 35 percent of the U.S. youth population by 2050— increase their active play time, become more physically active, and maintain a healthy weight.

### The Evidence

#### **Latino neighborhoods often have fewer or less safe spaces for active play.**

- Recreational resources differ by neighborhood income level and racial/ethnic composition, and three times as many Latino kids as White kids live in poverty.
- Studies show that kids from lower-income neighborhoods have less access to recreation facilities and are less likely to be physically active than kids from higher-income neighborhoods.
- One study found that one-third of Latinos lived within walking distance of a park, compared to about half of Whites.
- Studies of Latino neighborhoods have found that kids are often exposed to violent crime in the neighborhood, and their fear of crime curbs their outdoor active play.

#### **Latino children often have few opportunities for active play at and after school.**

- Minority-majority schools tend to offer few programs supporting physical activity.
- Elementary schools with primarily Latino students were less likely than those with primarily White students to offer 20 minutes of recess daily, or physical education for at least 150 minutes per week.
- Even in states that have active play policies, schools face implementation challenges due to competing priorities and lack of resources or policy knowledge.

#### **Parenting styles, perceptions and behaviors may influence the level of active play among Latino children.**

- Sedentary Latino parents had kids who also tended to be sedentary.
- A survey of primarily Latino parents and kids found that kids of parents who monitored and rewarded physical activity behaviors were more physically active compared with the kids of parents who did not use these parenting styles.



#### **ABOUT THIS ISSUE BRIEF**

*This issue brief is based on a research review prepared by Jennifer Swanson, M.E., JS Medical Communications, LLC, and Amelie G. Ramirez, Dr.P.H., and Kipling J. Gallion, M.A., University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. The full research review, which includes citations, is available at [www.salud-america.org](http://www.salud-america.org).*

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### **Implementing structured programs for active play at and after school may increase physical activity levels among Latino kids.**

- A school-based intervention for Latina middle-school girls reduced sedentary behavior and increased motivation to engage in regular exercise.
- The *Míranos!* program implemented in Head Start centers in San Antonio, Texas, significantly increased active play levels among Latino preschool children.
- A walking program for low-income Latino kids improved fitness by 37.1 percent.
- A Houston program increased Latina girls' aerobic capacity through physical activity (Latin dance, sports, or free play), education, and behavioral counseling.

### **Community-based programs that use culturally-relevant healthy living messages may increase Latino kids' active play after school.**

- The Active Living Logan Square program promoted physical activity in a Latino community by including ethnicity, language, and culture of place in the development and implementation of all programs.
- The VERB campaign used culturally relevant messages about health and physical activity to successfully increase active play among Latino children.

### **Addressing factors that impede active transportation to recreation sites in Latino neighborhoods may increase active play among Latino children.**

- Initiatives, such as the National Complete Streets Coalition and the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, aim to increase safety of neighborhood streets to facilitate walking and biking in underserved communities.

## **Conclusions and Policy Implications**

### **Conclusions**

- U.S. Latino neighborhoods have fewer sites available for active play.
- Latino children often have fewer opportunities for active play at and after school.
- Structured school- and community-based programs that are culturally relevant have demonstrated some success in increasing physical activity among Latino children.
- Educating Latino parents about monitoring and rewarding healthy behaviors may help their children be active.
- Increasing access to recreation sites and addressing neighborhood and environmental barriers to active transport may improve active play options.

### **Policy Implications**

- School administrators and staff should develop strategies for increasing opportunities for physical activity during the school day.
- Health departments, schools and communities should collaborate on culturally relevant after-school programs or activities to help Latino kids meet the federal standard of 60 minutes of daily physical activity.
- Programs are needed to educate Latino parents on strategies for improving physical activity among their children.
- Neighborhood maps of physical activity resources should identify the need and appropriate areas for more park and recreation spaces in Latino communities.
- Street-scale improvements and programs that facilitate safe transport are needed to increase use of physical activity sites in Latino communities.