

Government supports sport sector response to help schools and parents keep children active during Coronavirus

Tuesday 24 March, 2020

- Government backs a virtual weekly sport and physical activity digital programme to keep children active during the period of school closures

A workforce of more than 450 trusted and experienced leaders of school sport and physical activity programmes are being redeployed to provide online activities and digital content to support every child in achieving 60 active minutes a day in line with the Chief Medical Officer's guidance.

Sport England and children's charity the Youth Sport Trust have responded to a pressing need for action following the Government's announcement of school closures, remote working and social distancing. This is a key action within a broader sector pledge to work together and maximise impact.

The weekly programme will include a variety of activities such as fitness, personal challenges, online contests, problem solving games and those which support physical competence, and mindfulness. The emphasis of the programme will be on fun and wellbeing, and it will make it easier for schools and families to navigate the brilliant range of content being made available daily by people like Joe Wicks and organisations like the Premier League and the National Governing Bodies of Sport.

With schools closing their gates to all pupils except those of key workers and the most vulnerable children as of today (20 March), The Youth Sport Trust will galvanise the workforce of publicly funded School Games Organisers (SGO). The SGOs will respond to the needs of those schools still providing care to pupils as well as families and children to reduce sedentary behaviour and boredom, and instead foster daily exercise habits and a positive use of technology.

Culture Secretary Oliver Dowden said:

"We all know how important physical activity is for our physical and mental health. A week into self-isolating myself, it's been brilliant to see organisations and sports stars come forward with fun and innovative ways to keep us active at home.

"We've been working with bodies like Sport England and the Youth Sport Trust to give parents ideas to keep young people fit and active, give them a sense of routine, and support their learning at home."

The virtual national programme, endorsed by the Department for Culture Media and Sport, Department of Health & Social Care and Department for Education, will:

- Provide daily inspiration and inclusive activities which will allow all children and young people to continue to access 60 active minutes of physical activity while social distancing is in place
- Ensure physical literacy and physical fitness is maintained at a time when children's lifestyles could easily become more sedentary
- School Games Organisers will provide a network of support to schools in embedding physical activity, play and sport within virtual curriculums
- Simple and accessible ideas and content to help parents and carers maintain an active routine for children and young people during the disruption caused by COVID-19, which in turn will help support positive engagement, wellbeing as well as enhancing concentration and cognition to support remote learning

Sport governing bodies, including UK Sport, will support the campaign to enlist high-profile athletes to provide motivation and inspiration for young people.

Ali Oliver, Chief Executive of Youth Sport Trust, said: "There are two key priorities for our charity and the sport sector during this pandemic. One, we must ensure physical literacy, physical fitness and mental health is maintained at a time when children's lifestyles could easily become more sedentary. Two, we

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need to use this moment in history to promote healthier lifestyle habits and the positive and productive uses of technology.

“I am sure I speak for many when I say the anxiety and uncertainty that this pandemic is causing young people is deeply upsetting and concerning for their future health. But this is what the Youth Sport Trust and other bodies we work with exist for: we work tirelessly to support schools, communities, parents and carers to instill in children a love of movement and an understanding of how to unlock the physical, social, emotional and cognitive benefits that come from play and sport.

“We are working alongside many others in the sector to co-ordinate efforts and do all we can to help. We hope these weekly activity programmes will help make being in the home a more pleasant and positive experience for everybody.”

Sport England's Chief Executive, Tim Hollingsworth, said: “Helping our children stay active is going to be more important than ever – for everyone's physical and mental health. All the research shows that the biggest driver of whether children are active or not, is enjoyment, so this brand new online programme will be built with that in mind. We'd encourage parents to build activity into their own routines too, because research shows they are great role models - active parents are more likely to have active children.

“Sport England will also be launching a national campaign next week to encourage activity in and around the home. Lots of fun resources are already available on our website for activity that can be done with limited space and no equipment including Disney home workouts with much-loved characters from the movies and we want people to share their own great ideas online using the hashtag #StayinWorkOut.”

The weekly programme and resources will be made available on www.yourschoolgames.com.

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