Healthcare experts call for bold national action to tackle children's inactivity crisis

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The Class of 2035 Commission warns children's inactivity levels - driving rising anxiety, poor development and chronic conditions - are at a tipping point

The Class of 2035 Commission, convened by Youth Sport Trust and bringing together leading voices from across healthcare to address growing challenges in children's health and wellbeing, has today published its report and vision for change.

Building on the charity's previously published Class of 2035 report, which warned of the long-term consequences of declining physical activity levels, the Commission was chaired by former global Chief Medical Officer of Bupa Group, Dr Paula Franklin, and comprised of health experts spanning general practice, paediatrics, public health, mental health and research. The Commission's report highlights the increasingly visible impact of inactivity in clinical settings, with professionals reporting rising levels of anxiety, poor physical development, musculoskeletal issues and chronic conditions among children and young people.

The Commission reiterates warnings outlined by Youth Sport Trust including projected low activity levels, high screen time and increasing incidents of preventable health conditions, but shifts the focus towards solutions, informed by frontline experience and clinical expertise.

Dr Paula Franklin said, "There is a decline in children's health and wellbeing, the like of which we have not seen for decades. Children's lives are changing – they are less active and spend less time outdoors. Screen time dominates interaction, and unstructured, independent free play is limited. These seismic societal changes bring consequences with the impact now reaching classrooms, clinics, homes and communities as the repercussions of reduced movement and physical activity manifests in behavioural, physical and mental health conditions. The need for change is clear and compelling, and we are at a tipping point for childhood. Without significant action, decades of progress will be eroded and children's health will continue to worsen."

The report sets out six key recommendations to government, education and healthcare leaders:

- Raise awareness of the UK Chief Medical Officers' physical activity guidance for children among healthcare professionals.
- Strengthen and expand the social prescribing pathway for children and young people.
- Deliver a minimum amount of physical activity within every school and early years setting.
- Increase skills and competence for staff in the PE and School Sport Network.
- Implement a national wellbeing measurement programme for children and young people.
- Create a national, cross-government Children and Young People's Physical Activity Strategy.

Collectively, these actions are designed to better align health, education and community systems, ensuring children are supported to be active as part of everyday life. Read the full report and recommendations here.

Sir Mo Farah CBE, Youth Sport Trust National School Sport Champion, said, "Every young person deserves to grow up happy, healthy, and with the opportunity to achieve their full potential. Too few children in the UK are exercising regularly and it's having a detrimental impact on their health and wellbeing. We need a new Children and Young People's Physical Activity Strategy which guarantees every child daily opportunities to be physically active and unlocks the power of play and sport to improve young lives."

Ali Oliver MBE, Chief Executive of Youth Sport Trust, said, "Youth Sport Trust has been working diligently alongside education partners for over 30 years to build brighter futures for children and young people through the power of play and sport. In recent years schools have witnessed huge changes in the students coming through the gates, with young people leading more sedentary and isolated lives than ever before. We wanted a deeper understanding of the medical view on this to inform our work going forward. The Commission is the first time we have brought together the education and healthcare worlds to understand the new health conditions emerging in children and the outcomes have been startling. Daily movement and physical activity, from early years to adolescence is fundamental to ensuring these young people are thriving in life and in the classroom, and yet it remains overlooked and under-valued."

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Youth Sport Trust and the Class of 2035 Commissioners are calling on decision-makers across government and public services to act on the Commission’s recommendations and prioritise children’s physical activity as a critical public health issue.

About Youth Sport Trust

Youth Sport Trust is the leading UK children’s charity for improving young people's health and wellbeing through sport and play. We empower young people and equip educators to build brighter futures through the power of physical activity. Founded in 1995, we work with around 20,000 schools and provides opportunities for over two million children every year. Our vision is to create a future where every child enjoys the life-changing benefits of play and sport.

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