



The Healthy Kids Community Challenge

Our community is one of 45 across Ontario taking part in the Healthy Kids Community Challenge. This program unites communities with a common goal: improving children's health through physical activity and healthy eating. These two factors are key to helping children maintain a healthy weight.

Childhood overweight and obesity

Children and youth who are overweight or obese are more likely to become obese adults¹. This puts them at risk for many serious health problems. Examples include heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, breast and colon cancer, type 2 diabetes, gall bladder disease, and osteoarthritis².

Healthy weights not only improve our children's physical health, they can also boost their self-esteem and mental health. Yet studies show Aboriginal children have higher levels of overweight and obesity than other children.

- For Aboriginal children and youth aged 2-17 living off reserve, 59% are at a healthy weight, while 41% are overweight or obese³.
- Among First Nations kids aged 2-11 living on reserve, 37.5% are at a normal weight or underweight, while 62.5% are overweight or obese⁴.
- For those aged 12-17 living on reserve, 57% are of normal weight or underweight, while 43% are overweight or obese⁵.



Water does Wonders

The second theme for the Healthy Kids Community Challenge is **Water does Wonders**. This theme encourages families to quench their thirst with water – the natural and healthy choice. Communities are invited to create policies, programs, and other supports to promote this change.

Why 'Water does Wonders'

- Water makes up approximately 60% of a child's body weight. It is an essential nutrient⁶.
- Water regulates the temperatures of the human body. It carries nutrients and oxygen to cells, cushions organs and joints, aids digestion, and removes waste⁷.
- Water has zero calories and no sugar. This makes it a healthy choice for staying hydrated throughout the day.
- When kids drink water instead of sugar-sweetened drinks, they tend to consume fewer calories over the whole day⁸.
- Most tap water from municipal sources is fluoridated. This means that it helps teeth stay strong and protects against cavities⁹.

Did you know?

- Drinking water is an important part of overall healthy eating habits in kids.
- Studies have shown that healthy eating goes hand in hand with other behaviours that contribute to health and well-being. One study of First Nations children up to age 11, living on reserve, found that those who reported eating a balanced and nutritious diet all or most of the time were also more likely to:
 - *Take part in traditional drumming, singing, or dancing four times a week*
 - *Have someone at home who often shared traditional food with them*
 - *Consume soft drinks or fast food rarely (less than once a week)*
 - *Eat fruits and vegetables several times a day*
 - *Often eat traditional foods such as game, fowl and fish, berries and wild plant foods, corn soup, bannock, and wild rice*
 - *Take part in sports or lessons outside school more than once a week¹⁰*

Water: the first medicine

Water holds a special place in many Aboriginal teachings. It is valued not only for quenching thirst, but for giving life and strength. Water connects people to the earth and all living things, as well as to our ancestors and to future generations¹¹.

Aboriginal peoples often conduct ceremonies for giving thanks to water and for fostering a spiritual connection to water. An example of this is in the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving address. Giving thanks to water is a key part of this address¹². The Anishinaabe believe that water is alive. There are specific ceremonies for water.

“...water is alive. Water can hear what you’re saying, if you sing to it, the water will be happy, it can hear you. We, as Anishinaabe have known this for many years because of the ceremonies that we do, the water ceremonies.”

~ Elder Josephine Mandamin

(Mandamin, Josephine. “N’guh izhi chigaye, nibi onji: I will do it for the water.” Anishinaabemowin Niizh: Culture Movements, Critical Moments, 2011. Ed. Alan O Corbiere, Deborah McGregor, and Crystal Migwans. M’Chigeeng, ON: Ojibwe Cultural Foundation, 2012. 12-23)



Water access

In Ontario, most tap water is clean and safe. It is regulated by government and is owned and maintained by municipalities. Strict standards require municipalities to test their water sources constantly to make sure they are safe. Results of tests show water systems in Ontario are of very high quality.

However, in some areas access to safe drinking water may be a concern. Some communities may not have access to safe drinking water. This includes rural, northern, and/or First Nations on reserve communities.

To make sure water is safe to drink and use to prepare food, families in these communities may need to boil water. Or, they may need to buy bottled water. In these cases, providing education around safe water practices and increasing access to safe drinking water in community and home settings might be a focus of your local Healthy Kids Community Challenge interventions.





Quick facts about beverage consumption in kids

Water consumption

- 70% of Canadian children 5-17 years old drink water on a typical day¹³.
- In a survey of First Nations children up to age 11 living on reserve:
 - 70% reported drinking water several times a day
 - Almost 20% drank water once a day
 - More than 10% reported drinking water once a day or less¹⁴
- Dietary preferences are first established between 0-4 years. This lays the foundation for eating habits later in life. Research has shown that when children are used to drinking water at a young age, they are more likely to drink water later in life¹⁵.

Other beverages

- Among First Nations children up to age 11, living on reserve:
 - More than 20% drank soft drinks one or more times a day, while another 25% did so a few times a week
 - About 80% drank juice one or more times a day¹⁶
- Among First Nations children ages 2-5, living off reserve:
 - More than 75% consumed soft drinks and juice at least once a day¹⁷
- Among Métis children ages 2-5:
 - About 75% had soft drinks or juice at least once a day¹⁸
- Among Inuit children ages 2-5:
 - Almost 80% had soft drinks or juice at least once a day¹⁹

Limiting sugar-sweetened beverages

Sugar-sweetened beverages are drinks that contain added sugars and syrups. They include soft drinks, fruit drinks (such as punches, lemonades), specialty coffee/tea drinks, sports and energy drinks, and sweetened milks.

- Research consistently shows that sugar-sweetened drinks are linked to weight gain in children²⁰.
- One study found that every additional sugar-sweetened beverage per day equals 60% increase in risk of children becoming obese²¹.
- Sugar-sweetened drinks often replace healthier choices such as vegetables and fruits.
- Sugar-sweetened drinks don't give the feeling of fullness that comes from eating the same number of calories in solid food²².

Healthy hydration

- Canada's Food Guide encourages young children to drink water to quench their thirst and replenish body fluids.
- After 2 years of age, children can include skim, 1%, or 2% milk as part of their daily fluid intake and as a source of calcium and vitamin D. If a child cannot drink milk, a fortified, unsweetened soy beverage is a good alternative²³.
- 100% juice contains some vitamins and nutrients, but also contains a lot of naturally-occurring sugar. A piece of fruit or vegetable is a healthier choice as it also contains fibre. Children should not have more than one serving of juice a day – about a half cup (125 mL)²⁴.

Breastfeeding

Research has shown that breastfeeding infants may lower their risk of obesity²⁵.

- It is recommended that infants be exclusively breastfed during their first 6 months. Parents are encouraged to continue to breastfeed to the age of 2 (and beyond, if desired)²⁶.
- Caregivers should avoid giving infants under 12 months water unless medically indicated. Parents should also avoid giving them juices, cow's milk, and other liquids²⁷.

Nurturing change

As we look for ways to encourage our kids and families to choose water more often, we need to keep in mind the unique values and experiences of our community. For example:

- Aboriginal teachings approach health and wellness in a holistic way. This means the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual elements must all be in balance in a person. This idea is often represented by the four directions of the medicine wheel²⁸.
- Aboriginal people's health and well-being is influenced by real historical factors. This includes very real social, economic, and political inequities²⁹.

Many Aboriginal communities are working to overcome health challenges by fostering resilience among families and communities. This includes:

- Addressing the immediate disadvantages they face.
- Identifying and acting on the root causes of these challenges³⁰.

The Healthy Kids Community Challenge offers a great way to strengthen the resilience of some of the youngest people in our community. It can plant seeds of change that will help our communities flourish.



Questions? Need help?

To learn more about the activities in our community or to get involved, contact your Healthy Kids Community Challenge project manager:

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Name

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email

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Telephone

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Website

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