

# Does changing playgrounds have a positive effect on children's health?

September 2024

# Introduction

**To increase outdoor play, and provide our children with all associated health benefits, we need more safe and accessible places for play.**

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Today's children have far less outdoor playtime than previous generations. This is a concerning trend given the importance of outdoor play for children's physical, social, and mental development.

By presenting clear evidence of the health benefits of playgrounds, researchers can help convince policy makers and city planners to prioritize playground investments.

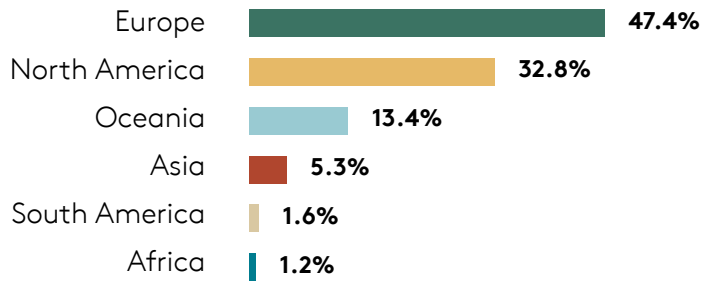
To support playgrounds' prioritization in urban planning, the World Playground Research Institute conducted an extensive review, analyzing 247 key publications to illustrate the health benefits of playgrounds.

In this brief, we present key findings that can guide and provide essential arguments for the (health) benefits of playgrounds. These arguments are particularly relevant for policy makers and city planners working to prioritize and plan for playground investments.

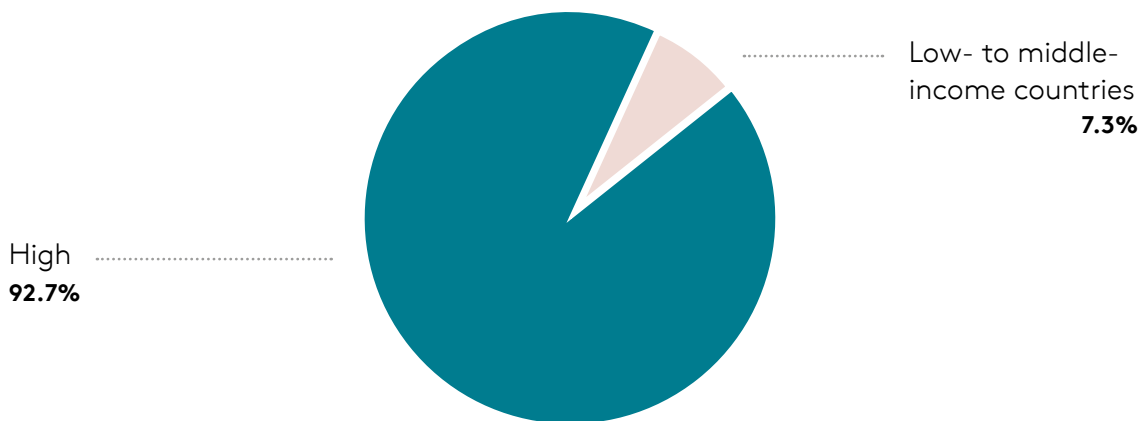
Additionally, this brief may also be useful for researchers and research communities looking for available information on the health benefits of playgrounds.

# Characteristics of the included studies

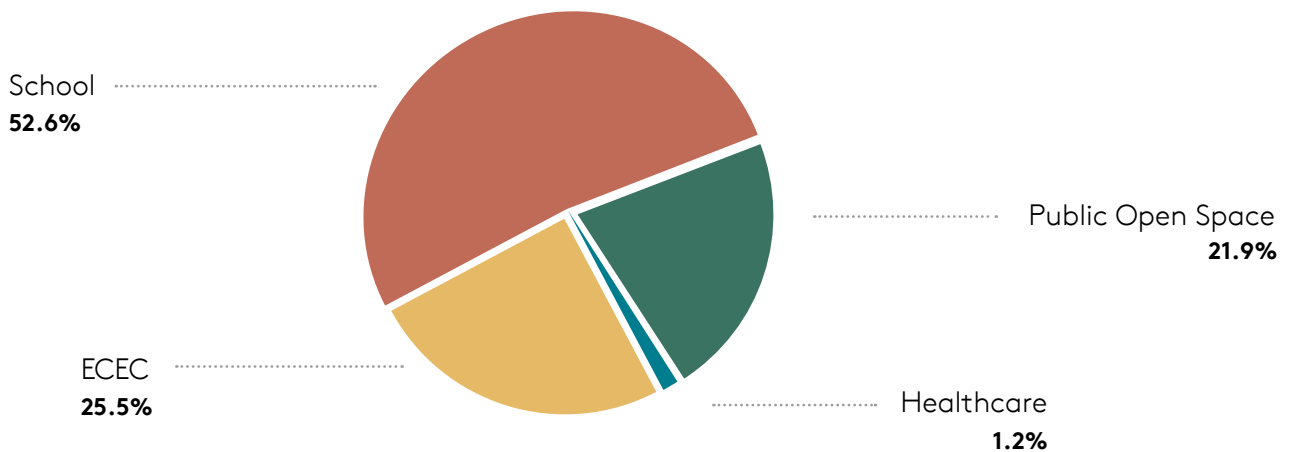
**Figure 1: Geography**



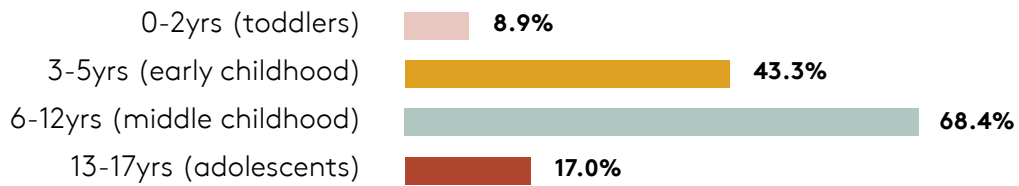
**Figure 2: Income Level**



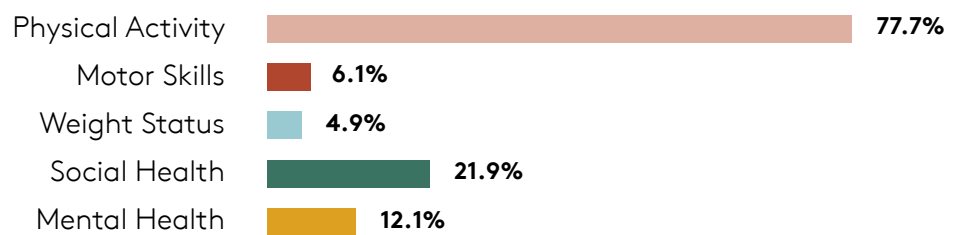
**Figure 3: Playground Setting**



**Figure 4:** Age Groups



**Figure 5:** Reported Outcomes



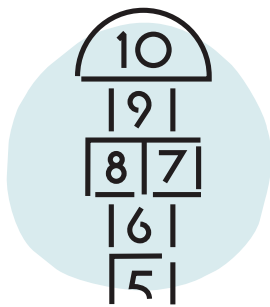
## What did the evidence tell us?

The large number of peer-reviewed articles shows us that the health benefits of using playgrounds are frequently studied by researchers.

**In other words, there is ample scientific evidence available that decision makers could use to advocate for playground investments.**

# Does changing playgrounds have a positive effect on children's health?

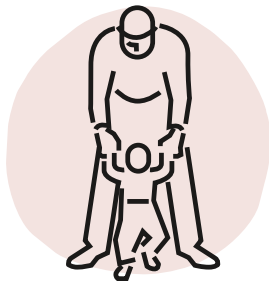
The short answer is **yes!** The longer answer is, it depends on the setting and the health outcome.



## Schoolyards

Changing school playgrounds, e.g. by adding schoolyard markings or playground equipment, has been shown to have a positive effect on physical activity in several studies and countries.

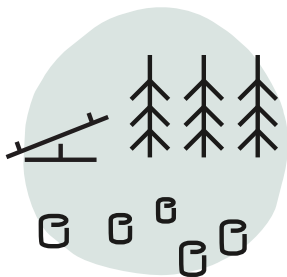
Adding more vegetation to school playgrounds has shown a positive effect on mental and social health.



## Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

In an ECEC setting, there is considerably less evidence than for schools, but the available evidence indicates that providing playgrounds with more space per child increases physical activity, whereas providing more vegetation seems to decrease physical activity.

Adding playground marking did not increase physical activity, but adding play structures did.



## Public Open Space

For playgrounds in public open space, the number of robust studies is even more limited, but one study conducted in Australia showed a positive effect of adding large, challenging play structures in a public park on physical activity.

## What areas of research need further exploration?

This review shows that there is strong evidence that upgrading playgrounds boosts physical activity in schools and may also positively affect children's mental and social health.

There is also some evidence that renewing playgrounds can increase physical activity in public open spaces and ECEC.

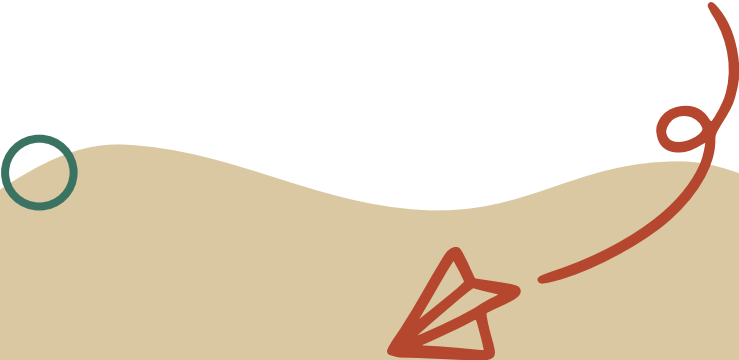
**However, the review also displays that ...**

- more efficacy and effectiveness studies on all health outcomes are needed, especially in public open spaces and ECEC.
- in schools, more efficacy and effectiveness studies should look at other health outcomes than physical activity.
- more studies are essential in middle- and low-income countries to provide evidence for the health benefits of playgrounds in these countries.



## This brief is based on

Schipperijn, J., Madsen, C. D., Toftager, M., Johansen, D. N., Lousen, I., Amholt, T. T., & Pawlowski, C. S. (2024). The role of playgrounds in promoting children's health—a scoping review. *International journal of behavioral nutrition and physical activity*, 21(1), 72.



## Sharing research

At the World Playground Research Institute, we are dedicated to sharing valuable insights from research studies and reviews through concise and accessible publications called Briefs.

Briefs provide summaries of key research findings and their implications, serving as valuable resources for policy and decision-makers.

All briefs focus on topics related to the development and design of playground as well as the impact of playgrounds on children's physical activity, mental and social health and motor skills.

To access our briefs, simply visit our website at [www.playgroundresearch.org](http://www.playgroundresearch.org).

# Contributors

## Internal collaborator

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