



NATURE IS THE BEST KIND OF NURTURE: NWF WHOLE CHILD REPORT EXAMINES THE HEALTH IMPACTS OF AN INDOOR CHILDHOOD AND BENEFITS OF TIME OUTSIDE

Reston, VA. (August 5)—For American parents who want their kids to be fit, focused and feeling good, the first step is out the front or back door. National Wildlife Federation (NWF) has issued a health report, **Whole Child: Developing Mind, Body and Spirit through Outdoor Play**, which is based on the current trend toward a holistic approach to health. The report reveals how American childhood’s move inside over the last 20 years has affected children’s physical and mental wellness. Available on-line, the report provides tools and recommendations for caregivers, healthcare providers, educators and policy makers to get children outdoors.

Reviewed by an independent panel of medical experts, the report begins with a day in the life of the average kid in 2010, immersed in technology. It suggests that Americans wake up to the reality that children today spend only **four to seven minutes** outside each day in unstructured outdoor play. While their parents spent free time in activities like a neighborhood game of tag, building forts, or climbing trees, the modern child’s day includes far more screen time than green time.

“American kids are out of shape, tuned out and stressed out because they’re missing something essential to their health and development, unstructured time outdoors,” says NWF Senior Vice President of Education Kevin Coyle. “It’s not just about a loss of innocence, the detachment from all things growing and green. It’s a serious public health issue we all need to care about.”

According to Deputy U.S. Surgeon General Dr. David Rutstein, lack of outdoor time is a key factor in the childhood obesity epidemic and, if trends aren’t reversed, may contribute to a generation with not only unhealthier but also shorter lives. “Overweight and obese adolescents have a 70 percent chance of becoming obese adults,” he says. “If this problem is not addressed, we will leave our children a legacy of shorter life spans for the first time in history.”

The **Whole Child** health report brings together a comprehensive picture of the effects to mind, body and spirit of the societal shift toward growing up indoors, including not only epidemic childhood obesity but also precipitously rising rates of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), childhood diabetes, and pediatric depression. It reveals the ways in which nature can help combat these problems and improve quality of life.

“I am deeply troubled by some of the trends I see in my practice including increased obesity in kids and higher rates of asthma, ADHD, anxiety and depression. What all kids need are natural,

safe places where they can play,” says Dr. Sandra Stenmark, a pediatrician with Kaiser Permanente and Physician Lead of Colorado Pediatric Cardiovascular Health who participated in NWF’s Summit on Children and the Outdoors this last April.

The health report is part of NWF’s Be Out There movement, which was created to give back to American children what they don’t even know they’ve lost, their connection to the natural world. In the process, NWF aims to help reverse alarming health trends and help families raise happier, healthier kids.

“As this report reveals, nature may indeed be the best kind of nurture,” says NWF Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President Jaime Berman Matyas.

The medical profession is starting to take note. “I’ve begun hearing about doctors around the country who are medicating their patients with nature in order to prevent or treat health problems ranging from heart disease to attention deficit disorder,” says Daphne Miller, MD, family physician and associate clinical professor at the University of California, San Francisco.

Whole Child includes recommendations for caregivers, healthcare providers, local, state and national leaders, and educators so that, together, they can begin changing American children’s indoor habits. Recommendations include asking parents to model “un-plugging” from technology and taking the Be Out There pledge to go outside with their children and advising pediatricians to write prescriptions for regular outdoor time for kids.

“I would rather write a prescription for safe, outdoor play for my pediatric patients than see them five years later with depression, anxiety and obesity,” says Wendy Kohatsu, MD, with Santa Rosa Family Medicine and assistant clinical professor at the University of California in San Francisco.

The report also recommends telling educators to include outdoor activities in the learning process, and urging legislators to pass the Moving Outdoors in Nature Act.

Some say it takes a village to raise a child. The National Wildlife Federation contends it takes a backyard, a playground, a park.

The complete report, as well as recommendations and a downloadable poster may be found at www.beoutthere.org

The National Wildlife Federation inspires Americans to protect wildlife for our children’s future.

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