

The Forecast Calls for Play



**Feel Confident
Outdoors
No Matter
The Weather**

All the Fuss About The Weather

“Think we’ll get snow this winter?”

“It’s raining cats and dogs out there!”

“Hot enough for ya?”



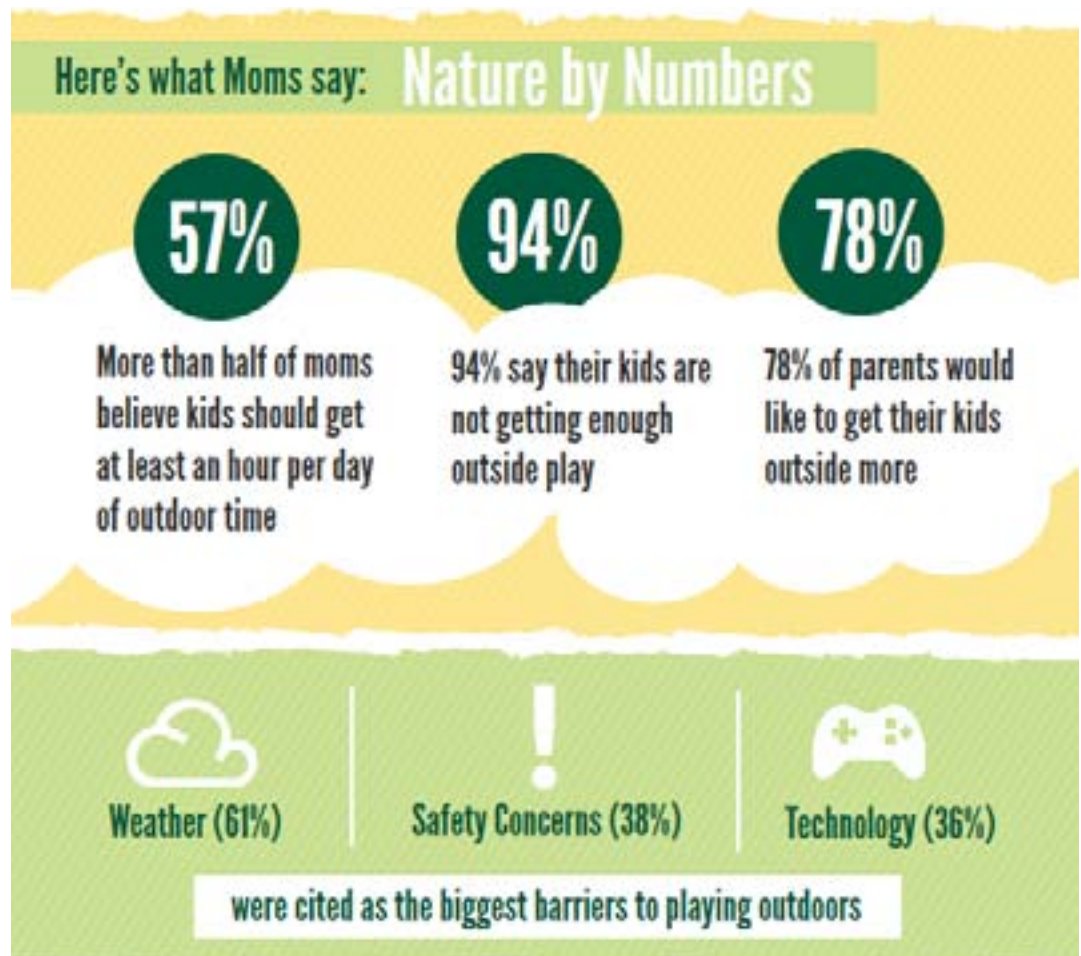
The weather: it’s what we talk about when there’s nothing else to say. But weather is more important than we think. Far from just a polite conversation starter, weather is preventing American kids from doing an activity that is no-cost, really good for them and right outside their doors: spending daily time outside.

According to a 2012 survey of 1000 parents commissioned by National Wildlife Federation (NWF), weather topped the list of barriers to getting kids outdoors. Sixty-one percent of those surveyed cited weather as most problematic, over concerns about strangers (38%), homework (31%), and a busy schedule (5%).

Parents protect their kids; it’s their job. So, it’s natural when the weather turns really nasty or dangerous to keep children inside. But, children are far more adaptable, resilient and hearty than we modern parents give them credit for. Two decades ago, kids routinely ran in the sprinkler to cool off on a sweltering day, made igloos when it snowed, splashed in puddles when it rained. How many do that now? Not many, statistics say. Modern children spend only minutes each day outside in unstructured activities.

They spend most of their time, seven hours per day on average, away from the elements entirely, in front of some kind of electronic screen.^{1,2,3}

Less than ideal weather—too cold, too damp, too hot—can quickly put a damper on outdoor play for today’s moms and dads. A drizzly Monday can mean carpooling to school rather than walking. Temperatures below 40 degrees and over 80 give us pause. But is all of this caution really necessary? Weather is, by nature, changeable. As the climate continues to warm, this is ever more the case, with greater extremes at both ends of the thermometer. But barring truly threatening conditions such as poor air, flooding and storms, **children are safe to play outside in most kinds of weather.**



In addition, being outside is life insurance for the environment. Studies have shown that kids who play outdoors when they're young grow up to be more conservation-minded. So, as adults, they care more about the wild things and places they've come to know and love as kids—and will work to preserve them for future generations.

When kids are kept unnecessarily indoors due to imperfect conditions, we “protect them” from something crucial to their health and well-being. As kids spend less and less time outside, it's clear that staying indoors is far more risky than going out. Today, one-third of children and adolescents are overweight or obese; 5.4 million U.S. kids are currently diagnosed with ADHD, with a 22% increase between 2003 and 2007 alone; 7.6 million U.S. children are vitamin D deficient, and the use of antidepressants in pediatric patients has risen sharply.⁵⁻⁸



But outdoor activities kids love, like running, jumping, climbing, playing games with friends and taking nature walks are a great strategy for keeping children healthy, physically, mentally and even academically. Kids who play outdoors maintain healthier body weights, are less likely to be near-sighted and have healthier vitamin D levels. In addition, “green time” enhances empathy, lengthens attention spans and improves critical thinking skills.⁹⁻¹³

In this report, we'll address for parents their concerns about inclement weather and provide information they need to take kids out with confidence.

YOUR WEATHER REPORT: **Feel Confident Outdoors, No Matter the Forecast**

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Don't Rain on My Parade

When it comes to outdoor play, wet can be wonderful

Parents of young children often keep a running list of “rainy day activities,” crafts or games to do indoors when forecast is soggy. How many include playing outside on that list? For those who don't, perhaps worries about wet weather making kids sick or getting caught in a storm—or even messing up the carpets—figure in. But if your kids have never dodged rain drops, jumped in a puddle or sang in the rain, they're missing out on something wonderful.

Rain can sometimes be blamed for causing children to catch colds or flu, particularly when kids' hair or feet get wet. **The fact is, rain cannot make you sick.**¹⁴ While getting wet may be inconvenient, dressing children in waterproof hats and boots and raincoats can protect kids from getting too soggy. Pick cheerful rain gear with cartoon characters or bright colors. This will help children want to don their slickers and get outdoors to play. Returning to a warm cup of cocoa helps, too.

In spring and summer, rain can bring along its less hospitable and more dangerous cousins, thunder and lightning. When storms pop up, extra care is necessary.



Pick cheerful, rain gear with cartoon characters or bright colors. Returning to a warm cup of cocoa helps, too.



To stay safe during a storm:

- Get out of the pool, lake, ocean, or any body of water. Water conducts electricity, meaning that electricity can travel through water.
- If you're outside, seek shelter in a house or building. If there's no house or building, wait out the storm in a car.
- If you're outside and can't get inside, don't stand under or near large objects, like tall trees. Lightning is more likely to hit something tall.
- Plan ahead. Talk with your kids about what to do if you get caught in a storm. Also be aware of the weather forecast when you'll be outdoors, such as on a camping trip. Then you'll be ready with a plan for getting to shelter if a storm blows up.¹⁵



Sometimes, however, the biggest obstacle to playing in the rain is not the fear of getting sick or a storm on the horizon: it is mom and dad. When parents are busy working and taking care of kids and a home, the last thing they want to deal with is muddy tracks across the foyer or wet, ruined carpets.



With a little forethought, a mess can be avoided:

- When you're heading out for some rainy fun, make sure you have a mat by the front door for wiping feet when you return
- Have kids remove boots and any wet or muddy items as soon as they walk in the door
- Keep some old towels just inside for spills
- Should mud get on the carpet, experts say to let the mud dry completely before vacuuming to ensure stain removal.¹⁶

Feeling Hot, Hot, Hot

Keeping kids safe, happy and comfortable all summer

Summertime and the outdoor living is easy, right? Not so fast. "Global warming is bringing more frequent and severe heat waves to much of the country," says Dr. Amanda Staudt, NWF climate scientist. With extreme heat comes increasing risks of heat-related health problems such as **heat stroke and sunburn**, as well as worsening asthma and allergies—all of which could make for a less than ideal summer vacation. But, summer is the ideal time to spend time outdoors. Kids are free of the pressures of school and homework and ready to take in all nature has to offer. By **getting educated, planning ahead and being prepared**, you can make the most of your kids' two-month break and spend time enjoying the season.

How hot is too hot? With summer temperatures reaching 90 degrees and triple digits starting in late May or early June in some parts of the country, how do you know if it's safe to take kids outdoors to play? According to Dr. Melinda Bossenmeyer, "Kids absorb more heat than adults, while sweating less. The result is kids have a greater propensity for heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke."²⁴ On a day where a high in the 80's is expected, making sure you have sunscreen and water along for the fun are great tips. But as the mercury rises further, it's important to check the weather report. In addition to forecasting high and low temperatures for the day, many also forecast heat index, pollen count air quality. Knowing what to expect can help you know when it's probably better to stay in and take steps when you do venture out.

NOAA's National Weather Service

Heat Index

Temperature (°F)

	80	82	84	86	88	90	92	94	96	98	100	102	104	106	108	110
40	80	81	83	85	88	91	94	97	101	105	109	114	119	124	130	136
45	80	82	84	87	89	93	96	100	104	109	114	119	124	130	137	
50	81	83	85	88	91	95	99	103	108	113	118	124	131	137		
55	81	84	86	89	93	97	101	106	112	117	124	130	137			
60	82	84	88	91	95	100	105	110	116	123	129	137				
65	82	85	89	93	96	103	108	114	121	128	136					
70	83	86	90	95	100	105	112	119	126	134						
75	84	88	92	97	103	109	116	124	132							
80	84	89	94	100	106	113	121	129								
85	85	90	96	102	110	117	126	135								
90	86	91	98	105	113	122	131									
95	86	93	100	108	117	127										
100	87	95	103	112	121	132										

Likelihood of Heat Disorders with Prolonged Exposure or Strenuous Activity

Caution Extreme Caution Danger Extreme Danger



Of course, swimming in a pool is a wonderful way to beat the heat, as is playing in a sprinkler. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) also recommends the following tips to prevent heat-related illness:¹⁷

- Drink plenty of water, and if kids are very active and sweating heavily, replace minerals and salts with kid-friendly sports drinks.
- Schedule your children's outdoor time in the coolest parts of the day, early in the morning and later in the afternoon.
- Dress kids in lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.
- NEVER leave a child (or pet) in a closed, parked vehicle.
- Give kids a cool shower or bath after returning indoors.



**And don't
forget the
sunscreen!**



Apply about a shot glass full of sunscreen to all exposed areas before going out.

The health benefits for kids playing outdoors are numerous—from lower body weights, to better eyesight and emotional well-being but it's important to be safe. As much as 80 percent of a person's lifetime exposure to skin-damaging ultraviolet rays occurs by age 18. Multiple studies have shown that the more youngsters are exposed to the sun early in life, especially if they suffer serious sunburns, the greater the risk of later developing both superficial skin cancers and deadly melanomas. Sadly, the issue of sun protection is all the more important these days because the thinning of the ozone layer has rendered everyone more susceptible to skin-damaging solar radiation. Experts say to apply about a shot glass full of sunscreen to all exposed areas before going out and insisting infants and children wear a hat.¹⁸ The American Melanoma Foundation recommends a broad-spectrum, waterproof or water-resistant sun block with a minimum of 15 SPF.

From April to October, in many areas, seasonal allergies are another challenge for parents to contend with in regard to outdoor play. When pollen counts are high, kids with hay fever may experience itchy-watery eyes, scratchy throats and sneezing. Experts say, in addition to any allergy medications recommended by your pediatrician, there are steps you can take to help allergic kids enjoy the outdoors:

1. Choose the right time of day to play may go a long way toward mitigating flare-ups, as pollen counts are lower in the early morning and evening.
2. Get kids some cool shades or sunglasses will prevent allergens from entering their eyes.
3. Have them shower and wash their hair once they come back in.¹⁸

Baby It's Cold Outside

Don't let frosty temperatures leave you cold

"Kids should get at least 60 minutes of exercise every day, and it's great if they can do so outside for the fresh air and more room to play."

Dr. Jennifer Shu

Despite their own winter wonderland memories, contemporary moms and dads can be reluctant to send kids outside when temperatures drop. Myths about cold and illness, concerns about safety and preparedness, and ignorance of the mental and physical health benefits to year-round outdoor play combine to make moms and dads think twice about braving the elements.

Take the commonly-held belief that spending time in the cold can give you one. Is there evidence spending time outside in the winter will make your child sick? According to the experts, no, because cold air does not cause colds, viruses do. In fact, staying indoors where germs are more likely to catch up with you may be a bigger problem.¹⁹

"Kids should get at least 60 minutes of exercise every day, and it's great if they can do so outside for the fresh air and more room to play," says Dr Jennifer Shu, a pediatrician and author of *Heading Home with Your Newborn*. "You can't catch a cold from simply being in the cold."

Playing outside in the winter does have its health risks, however. Having appropriate cold-weather gear is crucial.

Dressing for Winter

- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) urges dressing infants and children in several thin layers to keep them dry and warm.
- Don't forget a warm coat, boots, gloves or mittens, and a hat.
- In addition, setting reasonable time limits on outdoor play and having children come inside periodically to warm up will help prevent hypothermia and frostbite.
- AAP also reminds parents to coat kids' faces with sunscreen, as sunlight, especially reflecting off snow, can cause burns.²²



"Be sure to bundle up and limit exposure to as few as 20 or 30 minutes for little kids if it's [below freezing], and make sure they warm up and change into dry clothing if necessary when they come in," says Dr. Shu.²³



When days get short and cold in parts of the country, especially the northeast, getting a daily dose of the outdoors may be an important, all-natural prescription for kids' mental health. Some kids and teens, like some adults, are more susceptible to Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), also known as "the winter blues." According to family psychologist Dr. Susan Bartell, SAD symptoms may include crankiness, sleeping more than usual and difficulty concentrating, among others. The good news is spending time outdoors can help.²⁴

"Get outside as much as possible during the winter months to be sure kids get plenty of sunlight," says educational psychologist Dr. Mary Johnson-Gerard.

She suggests organizing winter theme walks to collect rocks or twigs; going sledding on plastic trays; or organizing a winter track meet with activities such as jumping backward the farthest, running sideways or blowing bubbles.²⁵



"Be sure to bundle up and limit exposure to as few as 20 or 30 minutes for little kids if it's below freezing."

Dr. Jennifer Shu

Don't Be a Fair-Weather Friend to Nature

The Forecast Calls for Play!

Spending time outside is great for kids, with benefits to their mental and physical health hard to get anywhere else. They need time outdoors to be healthy and happy. But nature needs our kids as much as our kids need nature: if they don't learn to love and appreciate it while they're young, who will ensure it will be there for them, and future generations, when they grow up? When we stay indoors because we don't want our kids to brave a few snowflakes—or we don't want to—we are doing a disservice not only to them and ourselves, but to the environment.

It's time to make like postal carriers and be outside in all kinds of weather.



For more wonderful
outdoor activities visit:
www.BeOutThere.org

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Join the Be Out There Movement



National Wildlife Federation's (NWF) **Be Out There** is a national movement to give back to American children what they don't even know they've lost – their connection to the natural world.

With a wealth of activities, events, and resources, Be Out There reconnects families with the great outdoors to raise happy, healthy children with a life-long love of nature.

Join us and take the pledge to Be Out There
www.BeOutThere.org/Join