

Citizen's Petition to Surgeon General on Outdoor Play

February, 3 2010

Dear Dr. Benjamin:

We the undersigned urge you to issue a Surgeon General "Call to Action" to promote the health benefits of daily, unstructured outdoor play for children and families.

Regardless of age, being in nature helps us lower our stress levels, get exercise and relax our minds. For children, contact with green space and natural settings improves their ability to learn, hones their agility and balance and can significantly calm those with anxiety and mood disorders. And, a childhood connection with the outdoors can lead to a lifelong ethic of respect for a clean and healthy environment.

Today's kids and families are missing out on nature. Recent research shows that the amount of time U.S. children spend outside has declined by 50 percent in the last two decades alone! Meanwhile, the rate of childhood obesity has skyrocketed, and children now spend 44.5 hours a week in front of some type of electronic screen. We find this trend, which goes by the name, "nature-deficit" alarming. Unfortunately, many Americans are unaware of nature-deficit and the implications for their own health.

As America's chief health educator, we implore you to take action and begin educating all Americans about the health benefits of connecting with nature.

Fortunately, part of the solution to nature deficit exists already. We ask that you actively encourage children and their families to set aside time every day for a "green hour." This simple concept means kids would do what they have for millenia--engage in unstructured outdoor play and interact with nature. We urge you to take action on this pressing public health issue.

16,343 Individual Signers - List Available on Request

References:

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