

# Under 5s physical activity Key Insights 2025

Data, Intelligence & Insights Team  
and  
Early Years & Childcare Team

# Physical activity survey context

- Physical activity is crucial for healthy development in the early years, impacting both physical and cognitive development and supporting positive mental health. To date, there has been very little data on physical activity in the early years (0-4 year olds).
- This 2025 survey was led by the Research, Insights and Consultation team and the [Healthy Early Years Award](#) team and based on questions used in the national [Active Lives Survey](#) for 5-16 year olds. Its aim is to better understand the current levels of physical activity of our youngest children (0-4 year olds) and to identify areas of work to support, promote positive attitudes, establish good habits and to give babies and young children the best start in life. The data resulting from the survey will help inform and support the delivery of the [We Can Be Active Strategy](#) in the city.
- The survey ran from the 29<sup>th</sup> September – 9<sup>th</sup> November 2025.
- Survey was advertised through:
  - Posters in Southampton Family Hubs, Libraries and Early Years settings
  - Social media through Facebook, Nextdoor and Bluesky
  - E-bulletins



**HEALTHY EARLY  
YEARS AWARD**  
Southampton

# Data caveats

- This is experimental data. This survey was the second time the England Active Lives Survey questions have been used in Southampton for a different age group with amendments made.
- This is the first time the survey had been published through the Research, Insights & Consultations team with support from the Communications team to distribute the survey.
- The survey includes children aged 0-5yrs.
- The sample represents 1% of the Southampton's children population aged 0-5yrs.
- There were a total of 49 additional 'free text' comments.
- There were a total of 200 responses, with 144 responses having a Southampton resident postcode. 56 responses had postcodes outside of Southampton or did not provide a full postcode.
- 279 children were mentioned in the survey, with 200 children having Southampton resident postcode.
- Blanks are excluded.
- Results are calculated from all responses or all children unless stated otherwise.

# Responses

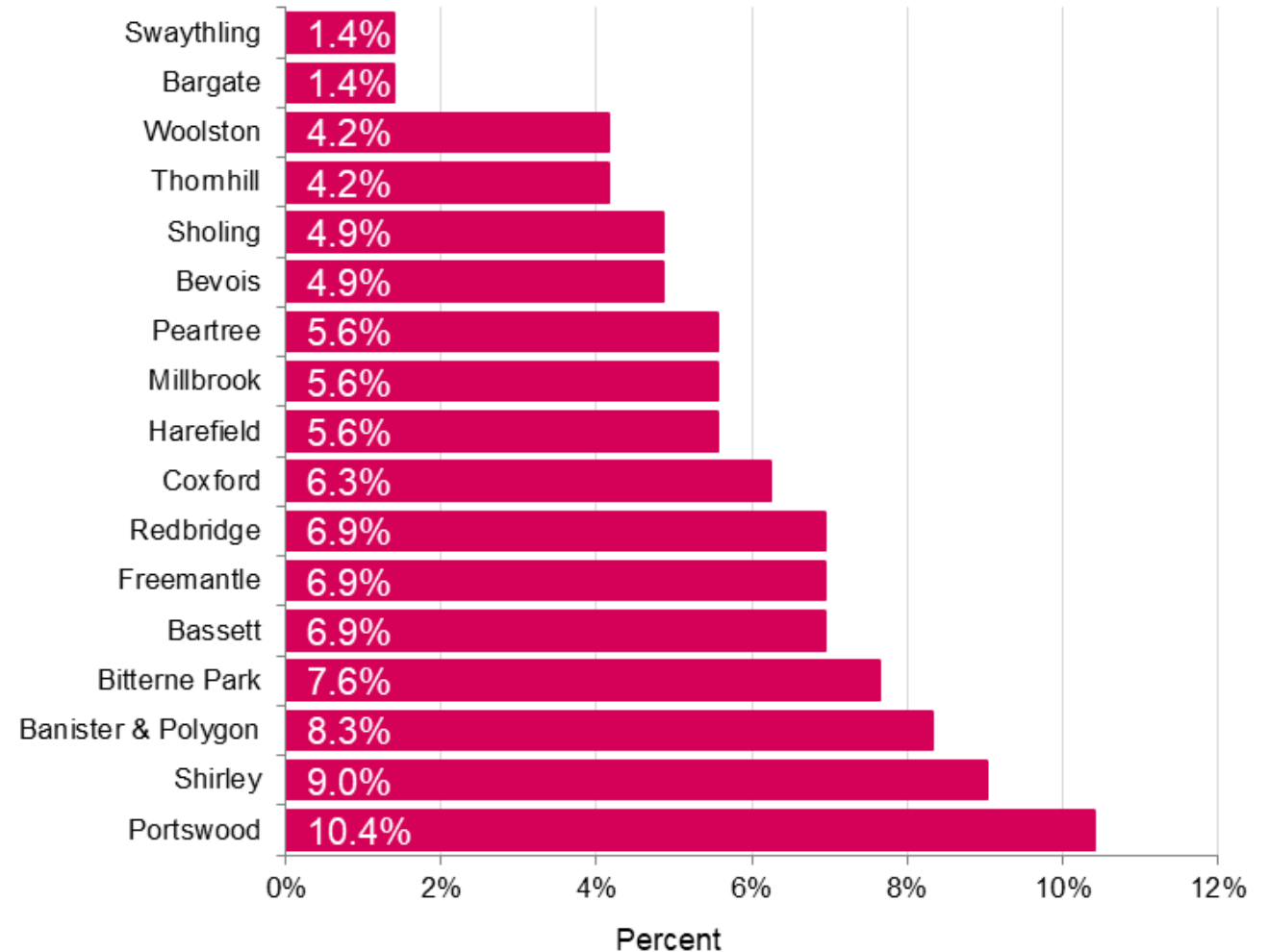
## 200 responses

144 responses had a Southampton resident postcode.

Locality	Percent
West	35%
North & Central	33%
East	32%

- Responses were split evenly across the localities.
- Higher response rate in Portswood and Shirley compared to Swaythling and Bargate.

Under 5s survey responses by Ward



# Demographics

## 279 children

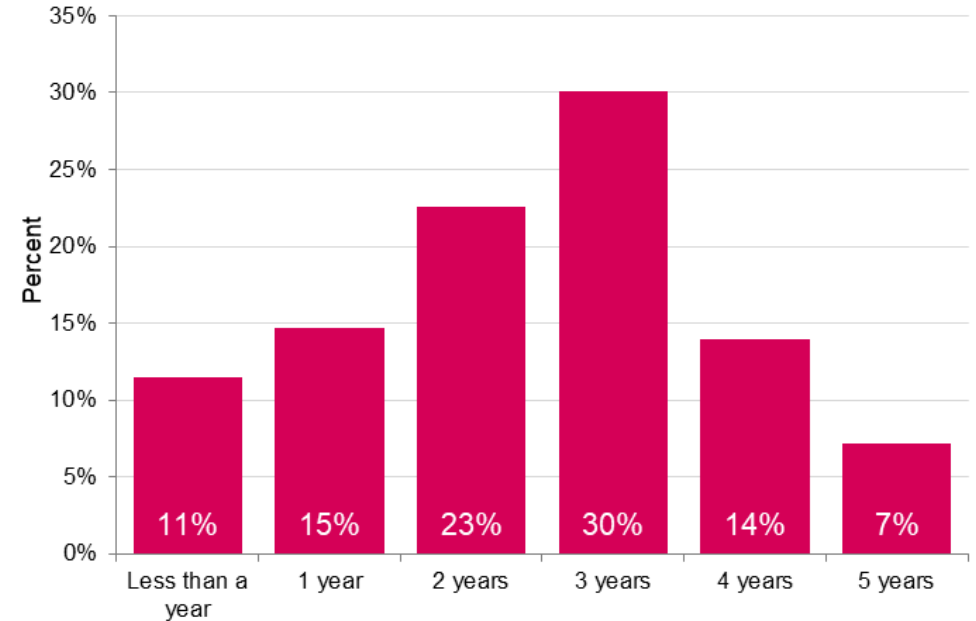
- 200 children had Southampton resident postcodes
- 79 children had postcodes outside of Southampton or a full postcode was not provided
- Of the multiple-choice options for sex; 'boy', 'girl', and 'prefer not to say', of all children:

53%  
Female



46%  
Male

Percentage of all children under 5 mentioned in the survey by age group



- **Half of the children** were ages **2-3 years**; 3 years was the most common age (30%) followed by children who are 2 years (23%).

# Understanding

Of respondent who are **Southampton residents**:

**77%**

of parents **agreed or strongly agreed** with the statement “I know how to **get involved and improve my skills** in lots of different types of **physical activity**”

**77%**

of parents **strongly agreed** with the statement “I **understand why being physically active is good** for me and my child/children”

**44%**

of parents were **aware of the recommended guidance** for levels of activity in the early years

# Involvement

Of respondent who are **Southampton residents**:

**48%**

of parents **agree or strongly agree** that they are **physically active** with their child/children



**99%**

of parents **agree or strongly agree** their child/children **enjoys being active** all of the time



**85%**

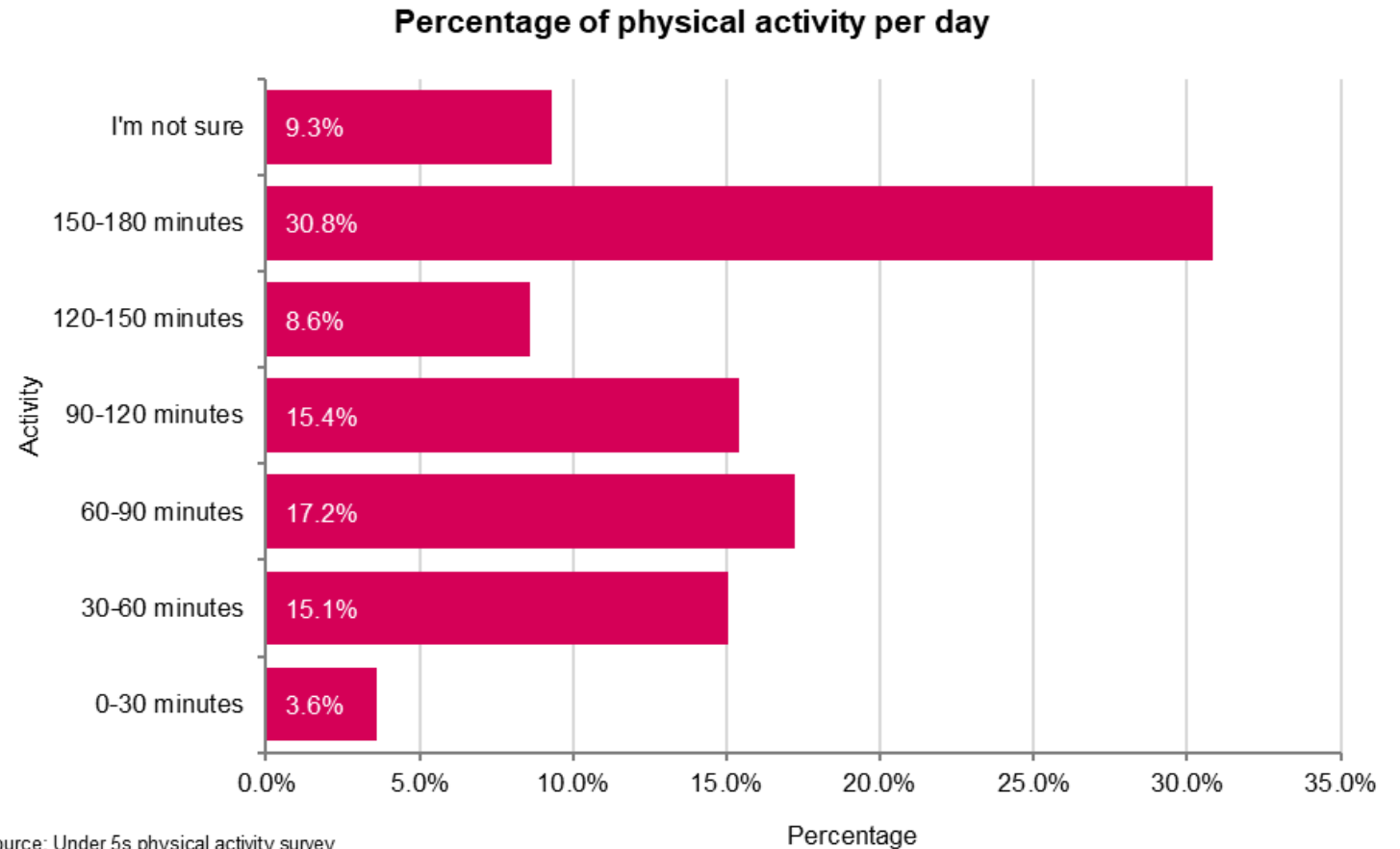
of parents **agree or strongly agree** that they **feel confident** when they are physically active with their child/children



# Physical activity per day

The [UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines, 2019](#), recommends **children 1-5** should aim for **at least 180 minutes** of physical activity per day and **infants under 1** at least **30 minutes**.

- Of all children, **30.8%** complete **150-180** minutes of physical activity per day.
- This is followed by **60-90** minutes with **17.2%**.
- Indicates **more than half** of children having **at least 90 minutes** of physical activity per day.



# Physical activity per day by age

34%

Of children **less than a year** old have **30-60 minutes** of physical activity a day.

46%

Of children aged **1-2 years** have **150-180 minutes** of physical activity a day.

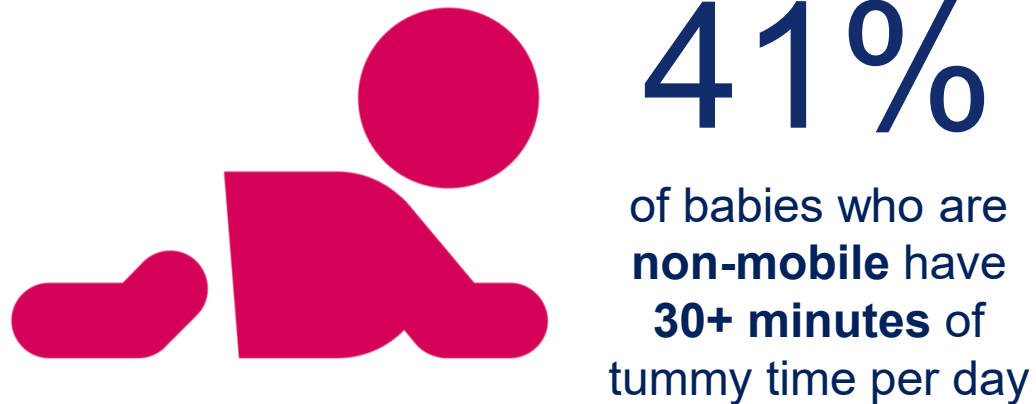
21%

Of children aged **3-4 years** have **150-180 minutes** of physical activity a day.

# Tummy time

The [UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines, 2019](#), recommends **infants under 1** have at **least 30 minutes** of tummy time a day.

- Of all children less than a year old, **41% were mobile**.

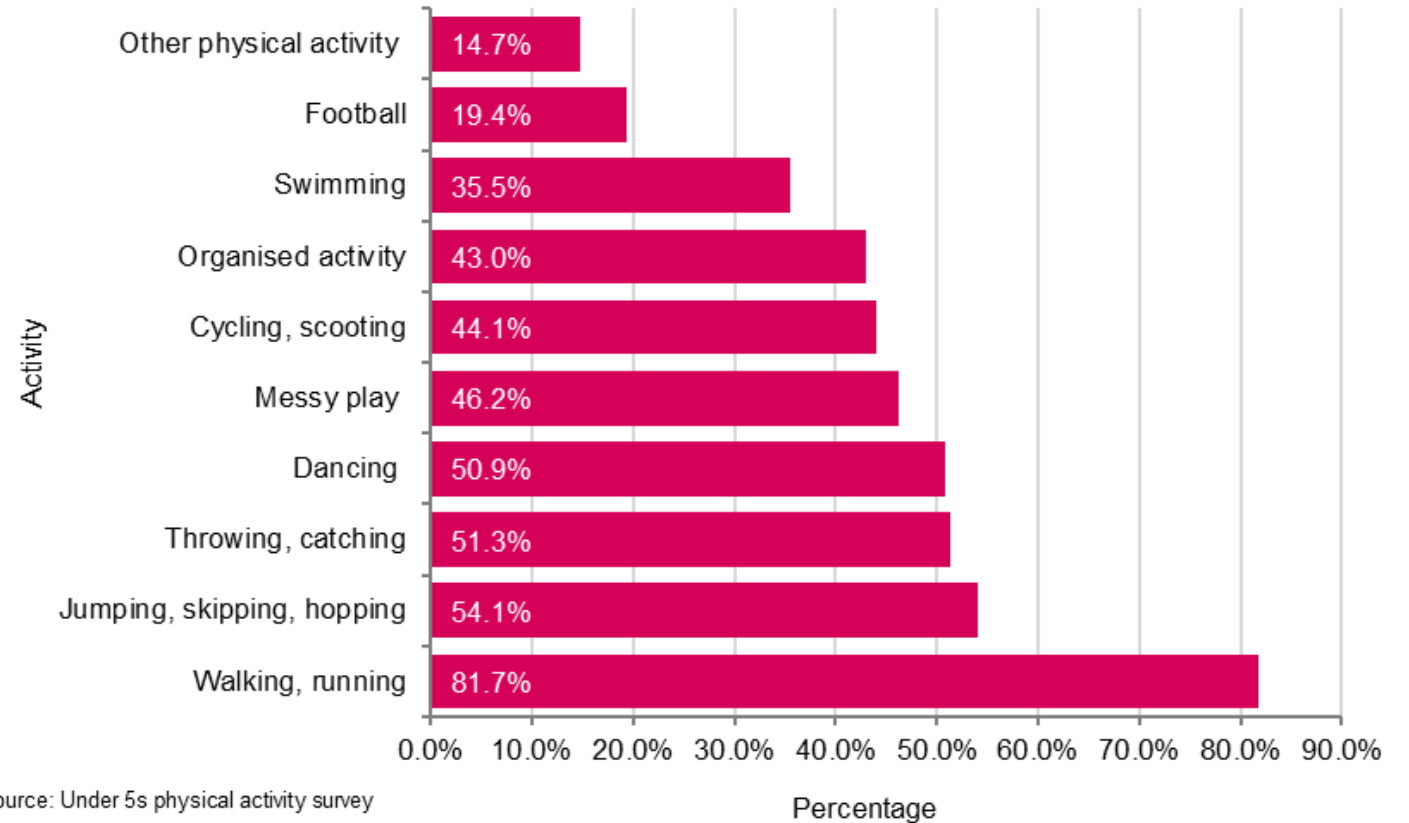


Additionally, **18%** of babies **0-12 months** have **0-15 minutes** of tummy time a day and **41%** have **16-30 minutes**.

# Activities per week

- Activities that are **zero or low cost, easily accessible** and **child-led** had **over 50% engagement** over the past week such as walking & running (**82%**), jumping, skipping & hopping (**54%**), throwing & catching (**51%**) and dancing (**51%**).
- In comparison, activities that may **require facilities, equipment, organisation or cost**, had lower engagement levels, including swimming (**35%**) and football (**19%**).

Percentage of children who have engaged with these activities over the past week



Source: Under 5s physical activity survey

\* More than 1 activity can be mentioned per response

# Activities per week by age

## Child mobility influences activity participation.

- From age 2 years, **walking & running** becomes universal, peaking at **95%** at age 3 years.
- **Jumping, skipping & hopping** climbs sharply at age 2 (**71%**) and stays high.
- **Messy play declines** steadily with age with **66%** of children participating at **1 year** and only **20%** of children participating at **5 years**.

## High percentages of participation coincide with child development stages.

- Children **<1 years** engage most with **other physical activity (53%)** and **messy play (22%)**.
- Children aged **1 and 2 years** start to move more and participate in **walking & running (85%** of 1-year-olds and **90%** of 2-year-olds), **dancing (59%** of 1-year-olds and **60%** of 2-year-olds) and **throwing & catching (71%** of 1-year-olds and **60%** of 2-year-olds).
- At **3 years**, participation in movement activities stay high with improved balance, coordination and body awareness. **Swimming** peaks in participation with **48%** of 3-year-olds.
- Ages **4 and 5** reflect a balance and independence point with **cycling & scootering** participation increasing sharply at **aged 4** with **79%** of children and **football** peaking at **30%** for children **aged 5**.

# Activities per week by sex

- For both **males and females**, the **highest** engagement was **walking & running** with **81%** and **83%** respectively.
- Over **50% of females** participated in **jumping, skipping & hopping** and **dancing** (both **56%**).
- **Football** had the **lowest engagement** with **11% of females**.
- **Throwing & catching** saw the **2<sup>nd</sup> highest** participation for **males** with **54%**, followed by **jumping, skipping & hopping** with **51%**.
- **44% of males** participated in **organised activities** and **30%** in **football**.
- **Swimming** saw a **low level** of engagement for both **males and females** (**37%** and **35%** respectively)

# Activity time per week

- **Across all activities**, most children spent **up to 2 hours** participating.
- **Walking & running** and **other physical** activity had the **highest participation of over 5 hours (32% and 29% respectively)** whilst **all other activities** had **less than 10%**.



## Short session activities:

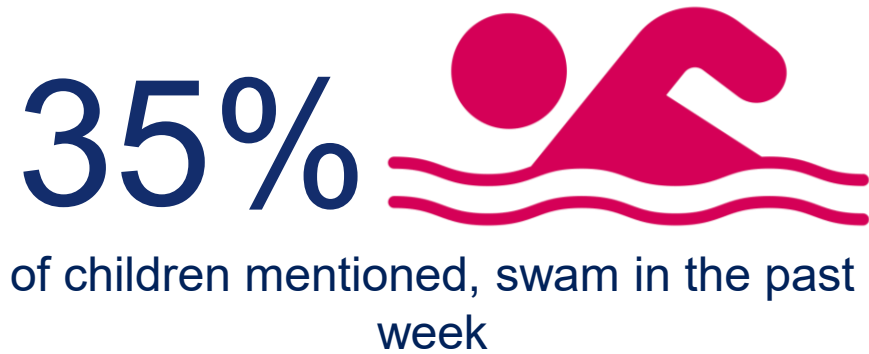
- **Throwing & catching:** 56% under 1h (lowest long-duration: only 14% >3h)
- **Jumping & skipping & hopping:** 45% under 1h (19% >3h)
- **Dancing:** 41% under 1h (19% >3h)
- **Football:** 44% under 1h (21% >3h)
- **Cycling & scootering:** 32% under 1h (22% >3h)

## Long duration activities:

- **Walking & running:** 49% >3h (32% are 5+ hours)
- **Other physical activity:** 55% >3h (29% are 5+ hours)

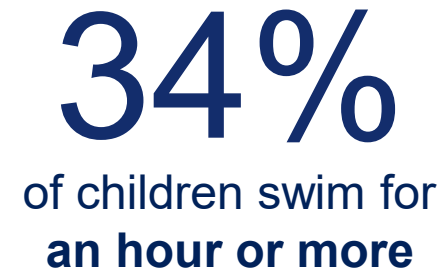
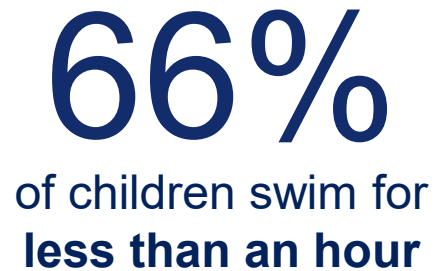


# Swimming



Of all children who swim (99):

Less than a year	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years
3%	12%	23%	40%	12%	9%



- Swimming pools set their own supervision policies, but a common guideline is one adult for every two children under 8 years, and a 1:1 ratio for children under 4 years.
- These requirements may influence whether parents choose to take their children swimming, but this cannot be confirmed from the available survey data.

# Facilities

Children using beaches, riverside, woodlands or hills to play and be physically active:

48%

Once or twice a week

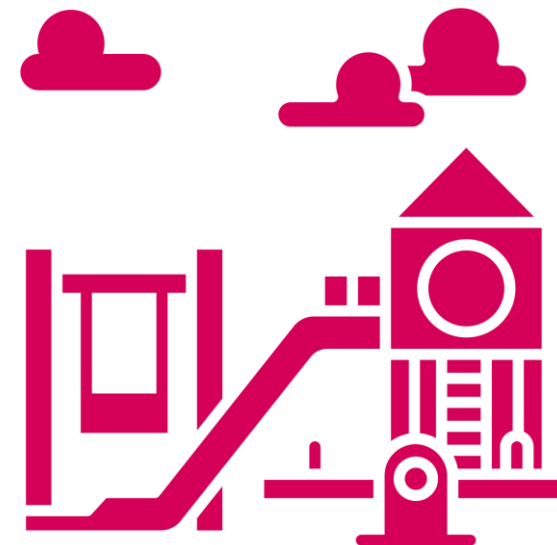
30%

Once or twice a month



70%

Of children used park facilities or public playgrounds to play and be physically active once or twice in a typical week



Age	Daily	Once/twice a month	Once/twice a week	Rarely
Less than a year	19%	0%	58%	23%
1 year	7%	10%	68%	15%
2 years	26%	5%	69%	0%
3 years	12%	11%	71%	6%
4 years	11%	8%	71%	11%
5 years	5%	0%	85%	10%
all children	15%	7%	70%	9%

Almost one-quarter of free text comments regarding parks in Southampton highlighted that they are not appropriate for toddlers.

# Environment

\*% of survey respondents who are residents of Southampton

## 91%



of parents **agreed or strongly agreed** that there are **local parks within easy walking distance** of their home



## 60%

of parents **disagreed or strongly disagreed** that there are **sufficient traffic lights or pedestrian crossings** to make it safe within the neighbourhood



## 70%

of parents **agreed or strongly agreed** that there are **accessible footpaths** on most of the streets in their local area

## 57%



of parents **agreed or strongly agreed** that it is **safe for their child/children to play outside supervised**



## 95%

of parents **agreed or strongly agreed** that there are **local shops within easy walking distance** of their home



# Comments

**53%** of additional comments discussed **parks being in poor condition, unsafe or lack of parks** (n=26)

Themes included:

- Parks designed for children who are walking/lack of equipment for younger children
- Missing or broken equipment
- Parks being locked
- Poorly maintained/lack of visibility in winter
- Lack of parks/local parks



**31%** of additional comments discussed **feeling unsafe due to cars** (n=15)

Themes included:

- Speeding/aggressive driving making commutes dangerous
- Cars parked on pavements making them inaccessible



\*of 49 comments

# Comments

**12%** of additional comments discussed  
**lack of activities for toddlers**  
(n=6)

Themes included:

- Limited availability of toddler activities including swimming
- Too few toddler play groups
- Difficulty finding information about existing toddler groups

Other comments included:

- Pavements inaccessible due to overgrown bushes, cars, uneven paving, bins blocking the pavement
- Lack of winter activities
- Expense
- Unsafe to cycle



\*of 49 comments

# Southampton Data Observatory

Southampton Data Observatory contains a large range of data, intelligence and insight on a range of topics:

- [Children and Young People](#)
- [Physical activity](#)
- [Healthy weight](#)

Further information is available here:

- [UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines](#)
- [We Can Be Active Strategy](#)
- [Southampton Healthy Early Years Award](#)
- [Children and Young People's Strategy](#)
- [Guidelines on physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep for children under 5 years of age](#)

KEY FACTS			
ESTIMATED POPULATION <b>260,111</b> HCC 2020-BASED SAPF	NUMBER OF DWELLINGS <b>109,900</b> VOA 2021	NUMBER OF BUSINESSES <b>8,785</b> ONS UK BUSINESS 2021	UNEMPLOYMENT <b>7,300 (5.1%)</b> ONS APS SEPTEMBER 2021
MALE LIFE EXPECTANCY <b>78.3</b> ONS 2018-20 (POOLED)	FEMALE LIFE EXPECTANCY <b>82.5</b> ONS 2018-20 (POOLED)	LIVE BIRTHS PER YEAR <b>2,791</b> ONS 2020	DEATHS PER YEAR <b>2,011</b> NHS DIGITAL PCMD 2020