

# **Southampton Strategic Assessment (JSNA)**

## **Physical activity page content**

**Last updated July 2025**

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## 1. Physical activity background

Physical activity is defined as ‘any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure’. All movement, whether experienced during work, leisure or for transport to get to and from places, can be defined as physical activity. Moderate intensity physical activity includes activities such as brisk walking and cycling, while vigorous intensity physical activity includes playing football, dancing or swimming.

### 1.1 Why is physical activity important?

[Office for Health Improvement and Disparities](#) suggests that regular physical activity has been shown to improve an individual’s physical and mental health. This includes preventing and managing diseases and a range of conditions such as hypertension, depression, and diabetes. as well as wider benefits such as improved confidence and self-esteem. Increasing physical activity of individuals can also benefit the wider community in a range of ways including:

- Increasing productivity in the workplace
- Improving learning and attainment in schools
- Building stronger communities and increasing social cohesion
- Cost savings for the health and social care system
- Decreasing road congestion and air pollution through active travel such as cycling

More information can be found in the physical activity dashboard and in the resources section below.

[Physical activity dashboard](#)

### 1.2 What amount of physical activity should individuals be aiming for?

According to national guidelines, from the [UK Chief Medical Officer](#) (CMO), children aged 5 to 18 should be aiming to do an average of at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity a day across the week. Children who do less than 30 minutes a day are defined as less active, while those that do between 30 and 59 minutes are fairly active. The guidelines include activities that develop movement skills, reduce inactivity and increase muscle and bone strength.

Adults between the ages of 19 and 64 should take part in at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity a week. Adults who do less than 30 minutes of moderate activity a week as defined as inactive, while those that do between 30 and 149 minutes are fairly active. The guidelines also include building strength, improving balance, and reducing inactivity.

There is separate guidance for children [under 5 years](#), [adults over 65](#), and [people with disabilities](#).

It is safer for people with long term conditions to be physically active. The [Benefits outweigh the risks: consensus statement](#), from the British Medical Journal (BMJ) on the risks of physical activity for people living with long-term conditions states the benefits outweigh the risks. Regular physical activity, in combination with standard medical care, has an important role in the management and prevention of many long term conditions.

More information can be found in the physical activity dashboard and in the resources section below.

[Physical activity dashboard](#)

### 1.3 Southampton strategy

As of March 2022, Southampton has adopted the '[We Can Be Active Strategy](#)' in line with Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. The aim of this strategy is to 'inspire and support active lifestyles so we can all be active in a way that suits us with success measured as 'people who once struggled to be active feeling the positive benefits of increased activity'.

In order to achieve this, it is recognised that the following need to be achieved:

- **Positive early experiences** for children and young people
- **Opportunities** that meet our needs, interests and are accessible and easy to find
- **Places and travel routes** where we all feel safe and are encouraged to be active
- **Support** to help us get started or keep moving when we feel that we can't do it alone
- **Bold Leaders** working together to create happier and healthier communities

The Physical Activity Alliance (PAA) is a partnership of a wide range of stakeholders who are committed to improving physical activity in Southampton. Members come from a variety of backgrounds to deliver an action plan informed by the [We Can Be Active strategy from Southampton City Council](#). Partners meet quarterly to share information and developments, network, and solve problems together. For more information on the Physical Activity Alliance, please contact [publichealth@southampton.gov.uk](mailto:publichealth@southampton.gov.uk)

More information can be found in the physical activity dashboard and in the resources section below.

[Physical activity dashboard](#)

## 2. Children

Children in Southampton are currently the 6<sup>th</sup> most active among Southampton's CIPFA comparators. In the academic year 2023/24 Sports England [Active Lives Survey](#), 47.4% of children and young people aged 5 to 16 years in Southampton were self-reported as being active. This is statistically similar to the England average of 47.8%. Southampton's value decreased 10.7% from 53.1% in 2022/23.

The [What About YOUth study](#) (2014/15) survey found that when looking specifically at 15 year olds, the percentage of individuals who were physically active for at least one hour per day for seven days a week was 12.5%, compared with 13.9% in England. It also found that 74.1% of 15 year olds in Southampton were reported to be sedentary for over 7 hours a day, compared with 70.1% nationally.

All schools provide 5 to 16 year olds with a minimum of 2 hours weekly physical education, which can be counted towards the physical activity levels outlined by the [CMO guidelines](#). If this was combined with using a more active form of travel such as walking and cycling, many students would be well on their way to reaching the recommended physical activity levels.

In the academic year 2023/24 [Active Lives Survey](#) conducted by Sport England, it was established that Active play (62%), active travel (59%) and team sports (57%) are the most common activities done in the last week across all children and young people nationally. Team sports were much more popular in children aged 7+. The report demonstrates the long-term impact of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic on children and young people's relationship with sport and physical activity.

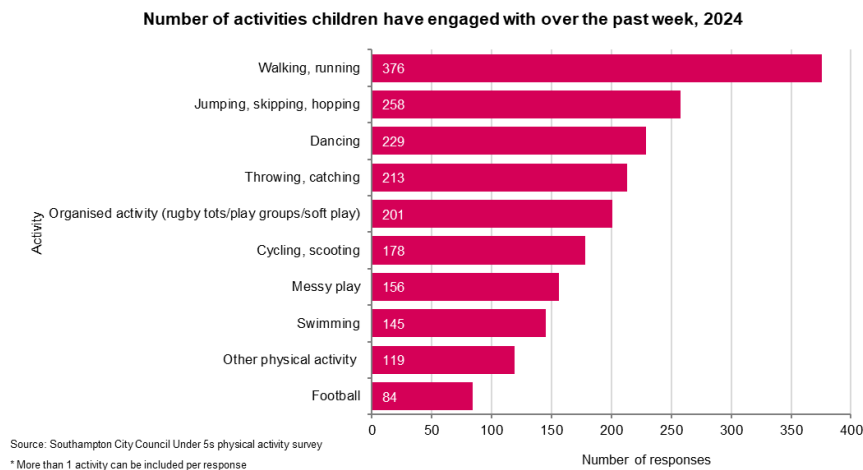
More information can be found in the physical activity dashboard and in the resources section below.

[Physical activity dashboard](#)

## 3. Under 5s physical activity survey

Physical activity is crucial for healthy development in the early years, impacting both physical and cognitive development as well as supporting positive mental health. To date, there has been very little data on physical activity in the early years (0 to 4 year olds). A 2024 experimental survey was led by the [Healthy Early Years Award](#) team to capture this data for children in Southampton and based on questions used in the national [Active Lives Survey](#) for 5 to 16 year olds. Its aim is to better understand the current levels of physical activity of our youngest children (0 to 4 year olds) and to identify areas of work to support and promote positive attitudes and to establish good habits at the earliest opportunity. The data resulting from the survey helps inform and support the delivery of the [We Can Be Active Strategy](#) in the city.

Initial experimental results indicate that children in Southampton have engaged with walking and running as the most common activity over the past week, followed by jumping, skipping and hopping. Approximately half of families complete 101-180 minutes of exercise per day. Additionally, 74% of parents stated their child/children uses park facilities or public playgrounds to play and be physically active once or twice in a typical week. Further analysis can be found in the linked slide deck.



The survey was sent out online to families with children under 5 years through Ofsted registered nurseries, pre-schools and childminders in Southampton between February and April 2024. It is not known if the sample is representative of the Southampton population. While the survey was experimental, the results should be viewed in line with caveats presented in the slides. Improvements will be implemented in the next survey to remove these caveats.

This page will be updated further following analysis of the next survey in Spring 2025.

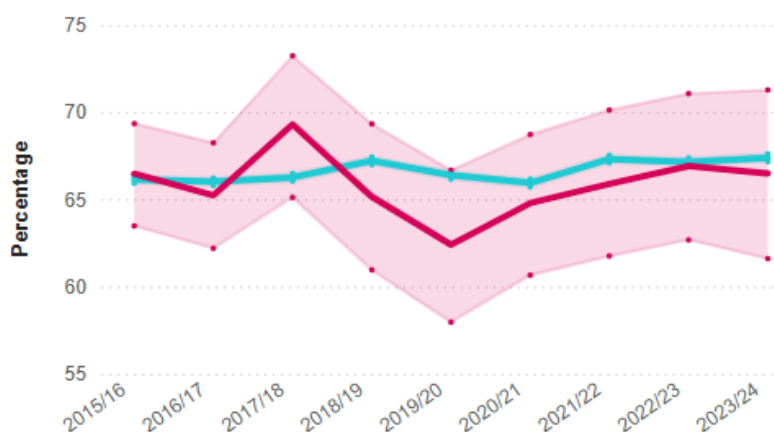
## 4. Adults

In the 2023/24 Sport England [Active Lives Survey](#) 66.5% of adults aged 19 and over, in Southampton, were considered active. This is statistically similar to the England average of 67.4% and 7<sup>th</sup> highest within Southampton's CIPFA comparators. The trend since 2019/20 is slowly increasing, following the COVID-19 pandemic. Although it is unclear what the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on activity levels is. In England, the proportion of adults considered active has remained similar over the last five years.

Percentage of physically active adults (at least 150 moderate intensity equivalent minutes of physical activity per week) aged 19 years and over, England, Southampton: 2015/16 to 2023/24

Data source: Active Lives Survey via OHID

Area ● England ● Southampton



In Southampton, 95% of the city have access to green space, of at least 2 hectares (just under the size of five football pitches), within 5 minutes walking time, whilst the whole city can access an area of greenspace, with a minimum size of 100 hectares, within a 5km drive. [Southampton Common](#) is the nearest area of greenspace, for two-thirds of Southampton's population and provides access to organised events such as a weekly Parkrun and Junior Parkrun, a children's play area, and cycle paths. In Southampton, there are 55 parks and 11 Green Flag awards for 5 Central Parks (as a collective award), St James' Park, Portswood Rec, Riverside Park, Freemantle Lake Park, Town Quay Park, Mayfield Park and Peartree Green. In 2024 Mansel Park, Millers Pond and Cedar Lodge Park also gained green flags. There are over 200 green spaces covering over 950 hectares (20% of Southampton land) including parks, gardens, recreation grounds, natural habitats, ecology areas "managed for wildlife". Southampton City Council also maintain over 100 play areas, 24 multi use games areas, 6 Skateparks and 7 Tennis courts, Southampton Municipal Golf Course and a mini-golf course.

More information can be found in the physical activity dashboard and in the resources section below.

[Physical activity dashboard](#)

## 5. Active travel

One possible way for adults to meet physical activity guidelines is to incorporate walking or cycling as a means of travel into their day. In the 2022/23 [Active Lives Adult Survey](#) from Sport England, 22.9% of people aged 16 plus, walked for travel at least three days a week. Compared to the England average of 18.6%.

[Cycling Southampton 2017-2027](#) sets out Southampton City Council's approach to investing in and realising the vision for cycling between 2017 and 2027. To make cycling treated as a normal form of transport and create a liveable and thriving city. It outlines what work has already been undertaken, develops a policy approach for cycling, and sets out a delivery plan of proposed improvements to the cycle network and initiatives to realise the vision for cycling in Southampton.

More information can be found in the resources section below.

## 6. Recreational water

Open water describes natural bodies of water such as lakes, canals, rivers and seas and these are commonly used for recreational activity (swimming or bathing, water sports, kayaking and sailing). Recreational use of open water is becoming more popular around the world, with increasing interest in open water or 'wild' swimming. There is growing evidence of the benefits of engaging with natural aquatic environments including enhanced mental well-being and increased opportunities for physical activity and social interactions. Open water environments are not sterile and may contain pathogenic microorganisms. These are naturally present in the water or introduced by different sources of pollution from example from humans, animals and or wildlife, sewage overflows and industrial activities; because of this, open water recreational use can carry risks to users becoming ill after contact.

### 6.1 Water quality

Most recreational waters in England are routinely monitored through standard microbial water quality measurements by the [Environment Agency](#), these are classified as 'designated bathing waters'. There are more than 400 designated bathing waters, with 72% meeting the 'excellent threshold for water quality', but this does not mean these waters are risk-free.

### 6.2 What are the illness and infection risks?

Gastrointestinal illness is the most commonly reported recreational water-related illness, with common symptoms including nausea, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, vomiting, dizziness and fever.

- Respiratory illnesses - cold or flu-like symptoms such as coughing, sore throat, fever and shortness of breath
- Ear, eye and skin infections - eye infections such as 'pink eye' or skin infections such as red spots, bumps and rashes

### 6.3 Evidence review and research findings

A rapid evidence review was carried out to investigate evidence of adverse health outcomes linked to recreational water exposure, specifically focusing on swimmers/bathers of open water (immersive contact) and infectious disease outcomes (the infectious focused only explored microbiological hazards and risks). The results synthesised the evidence from 10 European epidemiological studies



conducted on different types of recreational waters, since 2000, including one study conducted in London, England.

Evidence found that cases of gastrointestinal and respiratory illness were more frequent among bathers when compared to non-bathers. However, studies highlighted that the risk of illness is influenced by other factors including swallowing water, immersive contact, duration of water exposure, user susceptibility (particularly children and individuals with weakened immune systems) and the water quality, notably after heavy rainfall (a predictive indicator of faecal contamination and reduced water quality).

#### 6.4 Recommendations on keeping safe

- Check the bathing water quality of the site before use from DEFRA's [Swimfo: Find a bathing water](#)
- Be aware of weather conditions, particularly heavy rainfall as the quality of the water may be reduced
- Refrain from contact with open water if experiencing symptoms of gastrointestinal or respiratory illness to avoid transmission to other users
- Try to avoid swallowing water whilst swimming
- Observe local safety advice
- After exposure to open water, wash hands or use antibacterial hand sanitiser and shower as soon as possible
- Remove wet swimwear or wetsuits immediately when possible after exposure
- If becoming seriously ill after open water exposure, seek medical attention from a GP

## 7. Resources

### 7.1 Physical activity dashboard

The physical activity dashboard presents a range of data regarding physical activity, to provide intelligence to help drive strategic decision making, such as the Southampton Physical Activity and Sport Strategy and Cycling Southampton. Analysis includes benchmarking against statistical neighbours and trends over time. Some indicators include analysis at a sub-city level.

- [Physical activity dashboard](#)

### 7.2 Under 5s physical activity survey findings

This slide set includes analysis of the experimental Under 5s physical activity survey led by the Healthy Early Years Award team to capture this data for children in Southampton and based on questions used in the national Active Lives Survey for 5 to 16 year olds.

- [Under 5s physical activity survey findings](#)

### 7.3 We Can Be Active Strategy

We Can Be Active is a joint mission to inspire and support active lifestyles so we can all be active in a way that suits us.

- Energise Me - [We Can Be Active Strategy for Hampshire and Isle of Wight](#)

### 7.4 Cycling Southampton strategy

Cycling Southampton 2017-2027 sets out Southampton City Council's (SCC) approach to investing in and realising our vision for cycling between 2017 and 2027. To make cycling treated as a normal form of transport and create a liveable and thriving city. It outlines what work has already being undertaken, develops a policy approach for cycling, and sets out a Delivery Plan of proposed improvements to the cycle network and initiatives to realise the vision for cycling in Southampton.

- Southampton City Council – [Cycling Southampton, A strategy for our city 2017-2027](#)

### 7.5 Department for Health and Social Care - UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines

The report is an update to the 2011 physical activity guidelines issued by the four Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The UK CMOs draw upon global evidence to present guidelines for different age groups, covering the volume, duration, frequency and type of physical activity required across the life course to achieve health benefits.

- Department for Health and Social Care – [UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines](#)

### 7.6 Health matters: physical activity - prevention and management of long-term conditions

Health Matters focuses on the benefit of physical activity for the prevention and management of long-term conditions in adults. In the new UK Chief Medical Officers' (CMOs) physical activity guidelines launched in September 2019, the CMOs reiterated a clear message about physical activity: "If physical activity were a drug, we would refer to it as a miracle cure, due to the great many illnesses it can prevent and help treat."

- OHID - [Health matters: physical activity - prevention and management of long-term conditions](#)

### 7.7 Sport England

Active lives survey which measures the activity levels of people across England. Sport England run two surveys, Adults that runs twice a year and children and young people which is published annually. Active Places Power is a website to help those involved in providing sport provision. The website hosts a series of tools to guide investment decisions and develop sport provision strategies.

- Sport England - [Adult Active Lives Survey 2022/23](#)
- Sport England - [Active Lives Children and Young People Survey academic year 2023/24](#)
- Sport England - [Active Lives data tables](#)

- Sport England - [data query builder](#)
- Active Places Power – [England's national sport facility database and tools](#)

## 7.8 Fingertips – physical activity tool

The Physical Activity tool is part of a series of products produced by Office for Health Improvement and Disparities providing local data alongside national comparisons to support local health improvement. The physical activity tool brings together data for the whole of England on physical activity, including walking and cycling, as well as data on related risk factors and conditions such as obesity and diabetes. The tool presents data at local level to help promote physical activity, develop understanding, and support benchmarking, commissioning and service improvement.

- OHID fingertips - [Physical Activity](#)

## 7.9 Southampton Healthy Early Years Award (HEYA)

The Southampton Healthy Early Years Award (HEYA) offers a unique opportunity for settings to work towards a quality assured programme, helping to improve health and wellbeing for all children in the early years.

- [Southampton Healthy Early Years Award \(HEYA\)](#)

## 7.10 Green Space Index

The Green Space Index is Fields in Trust's annual barometer of publicly accessible local park and green space provision. Launched in 2019, it was the first such measure that had been created to take stock of the quantity of local park provision against the population of Great Britain.

- Homepage - [Green Space Index | Fields in Trust](#)
- Interactive maps - [Green Space Index 2024](#)

## 7.11 Moving Medicine

The benefits of physical activity for people living with long term conditions are well established. However, the fear of increasing symptoms or worsening long term problems commonly stops people from moving more. Many healthcare professionals also feel unsure about what advice they should give to people living with symptomatic medical conditions.

- Moving Medicine - [It's safer for people with long term conditions to be physically active](#)

## 7.12 British Medical Journal (BMJ)

The benefits of physical activity for people living with long-term conditions (LTCs) are well established. However, the risks of physical activity are less well documented. The fear of exacerbating symptoms and causing adverse events is a persuasive barrier to physical activity in this population.

- BMJ - [Benefits outweigh the risks: a consensus statement on the risks of physical activity for people living with long-term conditions](#)

### 7.13 NHS – Benefits of exercise

Step right up! It's the miracle cure we've all been waiting for. It can reduce your risk of major illnesses, such as coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and cancer and lower your risk of early death by up to 30%. It's free, easy to take, has an immediate effect and you don't need a GP to get some. Its name? Exercise.

- NHS England – [Benefits of exercise](#)

### 7.14 My Journey Southampton

Whether you are looking for information about local cycle routes to work, walking maps or links to public transport you can access it all here from our website. We offer advice about travel choices in your area that may result in saving you time and money. You may also benefit from improved wellbeing and reduce your carbon output at the same time. As well as providing personalised travel plans for local residents, we also work with schools, colleges and work places to deliver fun, community based travel challenges.

- Active travel - [My Journey Southampton](#)

### 7.15 Southampton City Council - Parks and open spaces

Information on parks and open spaces in Southampton.

- Southampton City Council - [Parks and open spaces](#)

### 7.16 Open water safety

The following resources help keep people safe and reduce health risks in open water swimming.

- [Recreational water-related illnesses: A rapid literature review](#) – A rapid literature review by Public Health in Southampton City Council
- [Recreational water-related illnesses: A rapid literature review – summary report](#) - A summary of the rapid literature review by Public Health in Southampton City Council
- <https://environment.data.gov.uk/bwq/profiles/> - information on places to swim
- [Swim healthy](#) - leaflet details how to reduce the health risks involved in open water swimming
- [Bathing waters - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) - Find out about the quality of water at England's beaches and inland waters and signage rules for local councils.
- [UK Health Security Agency – Swim health guidance](#)
- [National water safety forum – Open water swimming](#)
- [River Trust map of sewerage network discharges](#) - a map from the River Trust showing sewerage network discharges treated sewage and overflows of untreated sewage and stormwater into rivers in England & Wales in 2023. The website provides near real-time alerts.
- [Surfers Against Sewage – Safer seas and rivers service](#) - combines the Environment Agency's pollution risk forecasts with water company sewage spill data