

# Youth exercise study worries health experts

Nearly 25 percent of children got no physical activity at all outside school.

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**WASHINGTON** • America's kids are even more deeply rooted couch potatoes than experts initially thought.

Roughly 3 out of 5 kids ages 9 to 13 report that they don't participate in sports or other coached physical activities outside school, according to a nationwide survey of children

and their parents to be released today by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

About 1 in 4 kids in that age group had gotten no exercise at all outside school in the previous week.

Health experts said the inactivity was greater than they had expected and was worrisome. Lack of exercise is a likely contributor to the dra-

matic increases in obesity and type II diabetes among American children.

"This whole sedentary lifestyle is a big cultural problem in our country, and that's what we're up against," said CDC health scientist Marian Huhman, the lead author in the study, to be published in Friday's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

The 9 to 13 age group is key because that's the most physically active period of most people's lives, Huhman said. It's also the age when changes

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kids involved  
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in exercise habits probably would do the most good.

Once children hit puberty, "they become physically less active," said Ruth Saunders, a professor of health promotion at the University of South Carolina's School of Public Health in Columbia.

"If you start with only a third of them reporting being

**61%**  
kids who did not  
participate in  
organized  
physical activity  
outside school

active in some structured way at age 13, by the time they finish high school, who is going to be active?" she said.

The CDC surveyed more than 3,500 families - parents and children - and found that 39 percent of the kids had been involved in organized physical activity outside school in the past week and 77 percent had

done some kind of physical activity that "got your body moving" in the past week.

Parents said the main obstacles to their children getting more exercise are high costs, transportation problems and parents' lack of time.

The study is intended as the baseline for future studies to determine whether a new CDC ad campaign called VERB, aimed at getting kids to be more active, is working. The CDC has spent \$244 million on the effort in the past three years.