

Malaysia scores a dismal D- for children's Physical Activity Report Card

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PUTRAJAYA: Children aged five to 17 in Malaysia have scored an unsatisfactory D- on their physical activity and health on the Malaysia 2022 Physical Activity Report Card For Children And Adolescents, which was launched by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) in cooperation with Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance (AHKGA) and Sun Life Malaysia today (June 22).

UKM Health Sciences Faculty senior lecturer cum Active Healthy Kids Malaysia chairman, Associate Professor Dr Mohd Razif Shahril said immediate action needs to be taken by parents and the community to raise the level of physical activities for children.

The report card refers to the data collected from national surveys and government reports between 2016 and last year, and references 12 indicators, including overall physical activity, participation in organised sports and physical activity, active sports, active transportation, sedentary behaviour, schools, government, and diet.

Mohd Razif said that it was the second report following the first produced in 2016 by Active Healthy Kids Malaysia, a UKM research group.

"2016 was the first time Malaysia joined the Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance (AHKGA) Global Matrix 2.0 but sadly, the scores for last year's report card are almost similar to the 2016 report, meaning there has been little to no improvement in terms of physical activities.

"This time (Global Matrix 4.0) when compared to 57 other countries, Malaysia is 34th, with an overall grade of D- for physical activities," he said, adding that the grade was based on the 2017 National Health and Morbidity Survey that recorded only one out of five teens (19.8 per cent) aged 13 to 17 were reportedly active physically for at least 60 minutes a day for five or more days a week.

"Malaysia also scored a D- for diet, as only 23.5 per cent of teens in the same age group had daily recommended servings of fruits and vegetables.

"In a positive development, schools in Malaysia received an A- for fixed access to facilities and equipment that support physical activities," he said, as he expressed hope that the grade would be improved by the time Malaysia participates in the AHKGA Global Matrix 5.0 in 2026.

Meanwhile, UKM (Kuala Lumpur Campus) pro-vice chancellor Professor Datuk Dr Hanafiah Harunarashid, who officiated the launch of the report card, said that it would serve as a benchmark for the country and was in line with the university's goal to become a university focused on comprehensive research.

"UKM has great researchers who often achieve success in their own fields, resulting in various international, industrial and national grants, including one by Sun Life Assurance Company for this report card," he said.

Meanwhile, Sun Life Malaysia Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Ho Teck Seng, said the insurance and takaful company was proud to support the report card as it was closely aligned to their business purpose of helping people achieve lifetime financial security and live healthier lives.

"We hope to contribute to AHKGA's overall ambition to encourage children's healthy lifestyles through thought leadership, capacity building, advocacy, and awareness.

"At Sun Life, we believe that a sustainable future depends on a healthy and resilient younger generation. We believe that the findings from the report card will help stakeholders, policymakers, educators, and even parents identify more effective ways to encourage our youth to adopt healthy living habits," he said.

– Bernama