



Youth participation holds steady despite pandemic

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The number of young people playing table tennis remained stable in the last year, despite the coronavirus pandemic, according to the latest Active Lives Children and Young People Survey.

The Sport England report shows that 4% of children and young people in schools years 1–11 played table tennis at least once a week in the 2019–20 academic year. This equates to around 284,700 youngsters.

The figure shows no change from the previous academic year, which itself saw a significant increase of 3.3% on 2017–18.

Table tennis trends are consistent with squash and badminton, though racket sports as a whole are down because of a fall in those participating in tennis.

Overall, physical activity levels were down on the previous academic year – the report shows that only 44.9% of children and young people (3.2 million) met the Chief Medical Officer guidelines of taking part in sport and physical activity for an average of 60 minutes or more a day.

This represents a decrease of 1.9% (86,500) compared to the same period 12 months ago, although activity levels remain higher than in 2017/18.

Some 31.3% (2.3m) did less than an average of 30 minutes a day, an increase of 2.4% (+201,400) in the proportion who were less active over the last year. The number of less active children is still less than it was in 2017–18.

The report also shows that children from less affluent families and black communities are less likely to be active.

Greg Yarnall, Table Tennis England Head of Development and Volunteering, said: “The survey shows some positive activity trends for children and young people’s participation in table tennis since 2017–18, with table

tennis one of only three recognised sports (alongside basketball and running) showing a significant increase in participation levels – and this is the case for both boys and girls' participation.

"This demonstrates the fantastic work of clubs and coaches across the country and the impact that youth participation programmes such as TT Kidz is having on youth participation in table tennis.

"To help keep children and young people active and involved in table tennis over these last 12 months, we have a variety of play at home activities available, including TT Kidz live sessions and resource cards, which hundreds of young people have accessed already.

"We will be looking at ways we can support clubs to re-engage and bring new children and young people into their clubs, such as through the TT Kidz programme and recently launched TT Kidz Awards Scheme.

"The survey also shows that black children and young people and those from less affluent families are the least likely to be active and also show lower levels of enjoyment of sport and physical activity.

"These inequalities have only been heightened as a result of the covid-19 pandemic and as a sport we need to continue to look at how we offer the right type of activities in the right areas to ensure we are removing any barriers to participation in those and other demographics."

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