Activity Check-In
Impact of extreme weather on sport and physical activity
This report offers valuable insights into the intersection of physical activity, environmental sustainability, and weather-related challenges in England. Conducted over a period from January 26 to February 2, 2024, this report delves into the experiences and perspectives of adults and children across the country regarding their physical activity levels and how they are influenced by extreme weather conditions.

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Wave 10 of the Activity Check-In was conducted via an online survey completed by n=2,067 adults (aged 16+). All participants were from England and data has been weighted to be representative of the English population by age, gender, region, disability and socio-economic status. By socio-economic status we mean social grade, classified as follows; Upper (A), Middle (B/C1/C2), Lower (D/E). Data was collected between 26th January and 2nd February 2024.
Context

Better understanding of how extreme weather impacts people living in England is crucial to help us plan for safer and more sustainable sport and physical activities, ensuring that we can enjoy them responsibly while also protecting our environment for the future.

From understanding the impact of severe weather events on activity patterns to exploring demographic differences in response to these challenges, this report provides a comprehensive analysis of the current landscape.

It also sheds light on the role of environmental sustainability in shaping physical activity choices and identifies opportunities for promoting more environmentally conscious decision-making in the sports and physical activity sector.
Challenges of extreme weather

- Extreme weather\(^1\) events are now common, disrupting people’s physical activity levels. 82% of adults and 86% of children and young people surveyed have experienced extreme weather. Over 60% of those affected said it negatively affected their usual activities.

- For adults, factors like low motivation (54%), potential injury or illness (28%), and reduced enjoyment (26%) are more significant in reducing activity during extreme weather than logistical challenges such as facility closures (10%) or canceled sessions (9%). Lack of motivation (35%) was also the most common reason for children and young people.

- Those affected typically limit participation in outdoor activities, especially walking and cycling.

- Concerns are rising about future activity levels, with 3 in 10 adults and a third of children and young people expecting to reduce their activity levels over the next five years if extreme weather patterns continue. This is higher among younger people, women, and parents.

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\(^1\) Extreme weather is defined as any weather that’s unusually severe, frequent or unexpected for the local climate. This may refer to heatwaves, drought, excessive rain, storms, fog, and cold-related conditions.
Demographic differences

The impact of extreme weather events isn’t universal. While some people are able to demonstrate considerable resilience, others have more barriers to continuing with or adapting to maintain their activity levels.

• Younger adults exhibit greater adaptability, reflected by an increased likelihood to switch activities or adapt current routines/activities.

• However, older respondents (along with men and those without children) tended to report higher rates of unaffected activity levels.

• Adults from lower socioeconomic group DE are less likely to adapt their exercise routines to remain active, compared to group BC1C2.
Gap in sustainability

There is a clear need for awareness-raising initiatives aimed at enhancing understanding and integration of sustainability principles within the sport and physical activity sector.

- Although sustainability is increasingly prioritised in various aspects of life, it has yet to significantly influence physical activity choices and there is work to be done for this to happen in the future.

- Only 46% of adults considered environmental sustainability important in their sport and physical activity choices, compared to 57-62% in other aspects of life.

- 3 in 10 said environmental sustainability is unlikely to play a role in how they choose their sport and physical activities in the future.

- However, younger adults, Black & Asian individuals, and parents were more likely to practice sustainability in physical activity.

- There is an opportunity for the sector to build on awareness initiatives to promote a wider understanding of the link between activity and environmental sustainability.
Role of providers

In local areas, fewer than half (47%) of adults using providers feel they’re adequately adjusting opportunities for extreme weather events.

• Among those noticing changes, most say providers are adapting by hosting more virtual or online sessions (24%), altering session timings (20%), and adjusting existing activities (20%).

• Suggestions for adaptations included adjusting session times and providing facilities for extreme weather conditions – such as installing air conditioning, providing rooms to dry off/warm up, and improved water provision or improved heating systems.

Understanding these findings can inform targeted interventions to encourage physical activity while considering environmental sustainability and addressing weather-related challenges.
Role of Sport England

This insight shows how climate change and more frequent extreme weather could hold back physical activity and the health and happiness benefits it brings. Unfortunately, it will affect those who are least active and most deprived the most.

The sport and physical activity sector, like other parts of society, contributes to these problems by impacting the environment. This includes using a lot of energy in our buildings and during travel to participate, as well as through the equipment used and the waste generated.

Sport England want to lead the urgent change that’s needed, by being an environmentally responsible organisation and working with all our partners, big and small, to show the way and to drive climate awareness and action across England.

This research is crucial to understand how extreme weather events affect sport and physical activity. It will help us support the sector to become more resilient and maintain physical activity as our climate changes.

So, alongside the release of this Insight report, we’re launching our Environmental Sustainability strategy, ‘Every Move’. You can read it here to learn more about our vision for the sector and our plans to provide the support, guidance, and leadership to achieve this together.