



News Release

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New Study Finds Children Age Zero to Six Spend As Much Time With TV, Computers and Video Games As Playing Outside

***One in four children under two have a TV in their bedroom
Children in "heavy" TV households are less likely to read
Parents believe in educational value of TV and computers***

Washington, D.C. – Even the very youngest children in America are growing up immersed in media, spending hours a day watching TV and videos, using computers and playing video games, according to a new study released today by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. Children six and under spend an average of two hours a day using screen media (1:58), about the same amount of time they spend playing outside (2:01), and well over the amount they spend reading or being read to (39 minutes).

New interactive digital media have become an integral part of children's lives. Nearly half (48%) of children six and under have used a computer (31% of 0-3 year-olds and 70% of 4-6 year-olds). Just under a third (30%) have played video games (14% of 0-3 year-olds and 50% of 4-6 year-olds). Even the youngest children – those under two – are widely exposed to electronic media. Forty-three percent of those under two watch TV every day, and 26% have a TV in their bedroom (the American Academy of Pediatrics "urges parents to avoid television for children under 2 years old"). In any given day, two-thirds (68%) of children under two will use a screen media, for an average of just over two hours (2:05).

"It's not just teenagers who are wired up and tuned in, its babies in diapers as well," said Vicky Rideout, Vice President and Director of the Kaiser Family Foundation's Program for the Study of Entertainment Media and Health, the lead author of the study. "So much new media is being targeted at infants and toddlers, it's critical that we learn more about the impact it's having on child development."

The study, *Zero to Six: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers*, was conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Children's Digital Media Centers. It is the first publicly released national study of media use among the very youngest children, from 6 months to six years old.

"These are astonishing data. Today's preschoolers are starting to use media much younger than we thought," said study co-author Ellen Wartella, Dean of the College of Communication at the University of Texas. "Where previous generations were introduced to media through print, this generation's pathway is electronic. This is a trend we must follow."

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Bedroom media. A third of all 0-6 year-olds (36%) have a TV in their bedroom, more than one in four (27%) have a VCR or DVD, one in ten have a video game player, and 7% have a computer. Thirty percent of 0-3 year-olds have a TV in their room, and 43% of 4-6 year-olds do.

"When children have TVs and other media in their bedrooms, it's more difficult for parents to monitor what they're doing," noted study co-author Elizabeth Vandewater, Assistant Professor at the University of Texas at Austin. "The growing phenomenon of media in the bedroom and its impact on child development is a crucial area of future research."

Computers. In a typical day about one in four (27%) 4-6 year-olds uses a computer, and those who do spend an average of just over an hour at the keyboard (1:04). More than a third (39%) of 4-6 year-olds use a computer several times a week or more; 37% in this age group can turn the computer on by themselves, and 40% can load a CD-ROM.

Heavy TV households. Many children are growing up in homes where the TV is an ever-present companion: two-thirds (65%) live in homes where the TV is left on at least half the time or more, even if no one is watching, and one-third (36%) live in homes where the TV is on "always" or "most of the time" (the latter group are considered "heavy" TV households.)

Impact of TV on reading. According to the study, children who have a TV in their bedroom or who live in "heavy" TV households spend significantly more time watching than other children do, and less time reading or playing outside. Those with a TV in their room spend an average of 22 minutes more a day watching TV and videos than other children do. Those living in "heavy" TV households are more likely to watch every day (77% v. 56%), and to watch for longer when they do watch (an average of 34 minutes more a day). They are also less likely to read every day (59% v. 68%), and spend less time reading when they do read (6 minutes less a day). In fact, they are less likely than other children to be able to read at all (34% of children ages 4-6 from "heavy" TV households can read, compared to 56% of other children that age).

"These findings definitely raise a red flag about the impact of TV on children's reading," said Vicky Rideout of the Kaiser Family Foundation. "Clearly this needs to be a top priority for future research."

Parent's views on educational value of media. Parents of young children appear to have a largely positive view about TV and computers. They are significantly more likely to say TV "mostly helps" children's learning (43%) than "mostly hurts" it (27%); the overwhelming majority (72%) say computers "mostly help" children's learning. About half of parents consider educational TV shows (58%) and videos (49%) "very important" to children's intellectual development. They are also far more likely to say they have seen their children imitate positive behaviors from TV like sharing or helping (78%) than negative ones like hitting or kicking (36%). However, a majority of parents (59%) say their 4-6 year-old boys imitate aggressive behavior from TV (v. 35% for girls the same age).

Media rules. The vast majority of parents say they have rules about TV, including 90% with rules about *what* their kids watch and 69% with rules about *how much* they can watch. The study indicates the rules may have an effect: children with time-related rules spend an average of almost a half-hour less per day watching TV than other children do (1:00 vs. 1:29).

"When it comes to the impact of media on children, quality is as important as quantity," said study co-author Elizabeth Vandewater. "It looks like parents are getting the message that content matters," she added. "Parents should take heart, because this study shows that sticking to your guns regarding your children's media use does indeed make a difference."

Video games. Half (50%) of all 4-6 year-olds have played video games, and one in four (25%) play several times a week or more. Differences between boys and girls have already begun to emerge at this young age: 56% of boys have played video games, compared to 36% of girls; and in a typical day, 24% of boys will play, compared to 8% of girls.

Reading. Despite the plethora of new media, reading continues to be a regular part of young children's lives. In any given day, nearly eight in ten (79%) children six and under will read or be read to, and those who do spend an average of 49 minutes reading (83% will use screen media, for an average of 2 hours 22 minutes).

The results of the study are being presented during a panel discussion at the Barbara Jordan Conference Center, Kaiser Family Foundation building, from 9:30 a.m. to noon today (October 28). Participants include pediatricians, child development experts, and top executives from Scholastic, Sesame Workshop and Nickelodeon.

Methodology. This report is based on the results of a nationally representative, random digit dial telephone survey of 1,065 parents of children ages six months to six years old, conducted from April 11 to June 9, 2003. The survey was designed and analyzed by the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Children's Digital Media Centers, in consultation with Princeton Survey Research Associates (PSRA). The margin of error is $\pm 3\%$.

A live webcast of this event will be provided by kaisernetwork.org, a free service of the Kaiser Family Foundation. The webcast, transcript, and related resources will be available at <http://kaisernetwork.org/healthcast/kff/28oct03>.

Copies of the report (#3378) are available on the Kaiser Family Foundation's Web site at www.kff.org.

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation

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The Children's Digital Media Center

The Children's Digital Media Center (CDMC) is funded by the National Science Foundation to further collaborative research on the impact of digital and interactive media on children. The CDMC unites a national community of scholars, researchers, educators, policy-makers, and industry professionals in a community whose goal is to improve the media environment in which children live and learn.

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