

Frequently Asked Questions for Petition Urging Surgeon General to Promote Health Benefits of Daily Outdoor Play for Children and Families

- **What is the problem?**

“Nature deficit” is the problem and it is negatively affecting the physical, mental, and social health of many children and their families. Nature deficit has slowly been gaining national attention, particularly since the 2005 publication of *Last Child in the Wood* by author Richard Louv. The problem of nature deficit has steadily grown over the last two decades. During this time period the amount of time children spend playing outdoors and connecting with nature has been cut in half. Today’s children are missing out on the multiple benefits associated with outdoor play and exposure to nature including gaining physical activity and agility skills; learning how to concentrate and be creative; and developing self-esteem and interpersonal social skills.

- **Why write to the Surgeon General?**

We are urging the Surgeon General to take actions that will raise awareness about the physical, mental, and social health consequences that the problem of nature deficit poses for children and their families. As the nation’s chief public health officer, the Surgeon General is charged with promoting and protecting the health of all Americans. The Surgeon General provides Americans with the best and most up-to-date information on factors that influence health so that they can make informed decisions and choices about their lifestyle and behavior.

- **How can the Surgeon General take action?**

When Americans need to know about a specific health topic meriting their attention, the Surgeon General can take steps to highlight the topic, and set the stage for a national dialogue and policy change. The National Wildlife Federation believes “nature-deficit” is not only an environmental conservation issue, but also a public health issue, especially for children and their families.

- **Why should I or my organization sign onto the Surgeon General letter?**

- There is broad-based strength when diverse groups and interests band together around an issue that is more effective than a single organization acting on its own.
- Though supporters may not have 100 percent common ground, the nature deficit issue touches the core work of every organization being asked to sign on.
- All successful cause-oriented movements have used public education and awareness raising to advance a cause and make particular aspects of the cause more visible and prominent.

- **What does the research say about the health benefits of time outside in nature and where can I find more information?**

There is compelling and conclusive evidence originating from research in the fields of public health, psychology, planning, medicine, and others documenting the physical, mental, and social health benefits that children reap when they are allowed and encouraged to interact with nature in an outdoor setting. Among these health benefits are lower stress levels, a healthy weight, a stronger immune system, reduced incidence of anxiety-related disorders, better cognitive development, and respect for themselves, others, and the environment. Below is a partial listing of relevant information sources.

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