

Connecting kids to nature for better health, Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh announce expansion of *Pittsburgh Parks Rx* to health care practices

Pittsburgh kids will have more ways to get physically active and connect to nature in their local parks as the Pittsburgh Parks Prescription (Parks Rx) program expands to primary care practices. Parks Rx is designed to support the health and well-being of children through regular park use and contact with nature by equipping “park prescribers” with information and resources to inspire children and families to head to their local parks. “We are thrilled to partner with health care providers across Pittsburgh to connect residents to park spaces and encourage outdoor play as a preventative health strategy,” said Kathryn Hunninen, Senior Manager of Special Initiatives.

Over the past eight months, a Clinical Advisory Team of physicians and public health professionals worked to create a system through which doctors can prescribe park use to patients through Pittsburgh Parks Rx. The team carefully considered national park prescription models and adapted



and developed tools for local implementation. The program will roll out in five primary care practices in 2018: **Children's Community Pediatrics-GIL; Children's Primary Care Center – Oakland; Kids Plus Pediatrics; Pediatric Alliance-Allegheny; and UPMC St. Margaret Bloomfield Garfield Family Health Center.** This summer, patients will encounter Parks Rx resources and may receive a park prescription from their doctor or nurse during a well-child visit encouraging them to spend time outdoors. Patients can find parks and activity ideas on the Parks Rx webpage - www.pittsburghparks.org/rx - and sign up to receive periodic tips and info via a text message service.

Regular physical activity, regardless of age, is one of the most important lifestyle behaviors for maintaining a healthy weight and promoting quality of life. In addition, numerous studies show that being physically active in the outdoors and in connection with natural spaces provides added physical and

mental health benefits. However, **children only spend about one percent of their free time outdoors.** Park prescription programs have been introduced as a preventative health practice in many states and cities around the country to help address this concern. **Pittsburgh Parks Rx** aims to provide a local framework for healthcare professionals to encourage kids to get outside, be active, and connect with nature.

“Physical activity an hour a day, especially when done outdoors, can reduce the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, depression, ADHD and many more physical and mental health conditions,” says Justin Schreiber, DO, MPH, FAAP, UPMC Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh. “The parks are the perfect place to spend this hour, which is why I encourage all of my patients and their families to know their local parks.”



Parks Rx is currently targeted toward children ages 3-12 and their caregivers, with an emphasis on working through three pathways: **schools, community organizations, and clinical practices.** The program launched in 2016 by the [Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy](#) and [UPMC Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh](#), in collaboration with many partners, with an initial focus on engaging schools and community organizations. **Pittsburgh Parks Rx prescribers now include family doctors and clinics, school nurses, teachers, and physical education instructors, family support centers, and community organizations.** Pittsburgh Parks Rx participants

receive materials custom-designed for them that assist in finding seasonal activities in a park near them and ongoing contact with their Pittsburgh Parks Rx prescriber. Materials include individual park guides that show park hours, directions, and park activity ideas and nature treasure hunts.

Pittsburgh Parks Rx is the result of strong partnerships with Allegheny County Health Department, UPMC Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh, the City of Pittsburgh’s Department of Parks and Recreation, Live Well Allegheny, schools, afterschool programs, family support centers, and multiple primary care clinics. All share the goals of better health through outdoor activity and making learning through nature fun for Pittsburgh’s young people.

For resources and downloadable materials, or to indicate that your child, school, or community group would like to be involved with Pittsburgh Parks Rx, please visit www.pittsburghparks.org/rx.

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About the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy:

The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy was founded in December 1996 by a group of citizens concerned with the deteriorating conditions of Pittsburgh’s historic city parks. A non-profit organization, the Parks Conservancy works closely with the City of Pittsburgh under an official public-private partnership agreement to restore and improve the city’s park system to its full potential. To date, the Parks Conservancy has raised over \$108 million and completed 17 major park improvement projects. Annually

the Parks Conservancy works with thousands of volunteers and provides programming for more than 5,000 children.

About UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh:

Regionally, nationally, and globally, UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh is a leader in the treatment of childhood conditions and diseases, a pioneer in the development of new and improved therapies, and a top educator of the next generation of pediatricians and pediatric subspecialists. Children's Hospital has fulfilled this mission since its founding in 1890. Children's is named consistently to several elite lists of pediatric hospitals, including ranking 13th among children's hospitals and schools of medicine (FY 2017) in funding for pediatric research provided by the National Institutes of Health, and is one of 10 pediatric hospitals in the United States named to the U.S. News & World Report Honor Roll of America's "Best Children's Hospitals" for 2017-2018.