



For more information about Walk to School in the USA, please visit [www.walktoschool.org](http://www.walktoschool.org).

For information about international events, please visit [www.iwalktoschool.org](http://www.iwalktoschool.org).

For information about Safe Routes to School, please visit [www.saferoutesinfo.org](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org).

## Talking Points

### *International Walk to School Day(October 5, 2005) and Week (October 3-7, 2005)*

The following information can be helpful in communicating with the public and media during International Walk to School Day and Week. Topics include:

- Trends in school travel
- Safety, physical activity and concern for the environment  
(According to surveys of Walk to School coordinators, these are the main reasons why communities hold events.)
- Safe Routes to School
- Background on the event and a list of participating countries.

### **Trends in school travel**

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#### **Fewer children walk or bike to school than did so a generation ago.**

- In 2001, less than 16 percent of students between the ages of 5 and 15 walked or biked to or from school.
- In 1969, 48 percent of students walked or biked to school.<sup>1</sup>
- This is an opportunity lost. Walking or biking to school gives children time for physical activity and a sense of responsibility and independence; allows them to enjoy being outside; and provides them with time to socialize with their parents and friends and to get to know their neighborhoods.

#### **As much as 26 percent of morning traffic can be school-related.<sup>2</sup>**

- Traffic can lead to even less walking or biking. As more children are driven, more parents become convinced that traffic conditions make it unsafe for walking or bicycling and they join the line of cars at the school.
- If more children walked or biked to school, it would reduce the number of cars near the school at pick-up and drop-off times making it safer for walkers and bicyclists and reducing traffic congestion.

#### **It takes about five to ten minutes for children to walk a quarter of a mile or bike an entire mile.**

- Walking or biking to and from school is an easy way for children to get some physical activity each day, which all children need.

#### **School districts across the country are feeling the strain on school transportation budgets as a result of increased fuel prices.**

- Walking and biking to school offers a no-cost or low-cost alternative to bus and passenger car transportation.

### **Safety**

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Walking and bicycling need to be safe transportation options which means creating safe environments and teaching safety skills to walkers, bicyclists and drivers.

#### **Safe walking and bicycling environments include:**

- Neighborhood schools that are within walking and bicycling distance from homes
- Sidewalks or bike-paths that connect homes with schools

- Improved opportunities to cross streets (such as the presence of adult crossing guards, raised medians or traffic and pedestrian signals)
- Slow vehicle speeds accomplished through roadway safety measures (traffic calming) and/or police enforcement where needed

**Vehicle speed is a key element in safety. Driving slower saves lives.** A pedestrian hit by a car traveling 40 mph has a mere 15 percent chance of survival. At 30 mph, those odds increase to 45 percent. By contrast, a pedestrian has an 85 percent chance of survival if hit by a car moving at 20 mph.<sup>3</sup>

**Safety education includes working with:**

- Children - to provide them with basic safety education, such as how to cross streets, obey crossing guards and be visible to drivers.
- Parents - to create awareness of the need for pedestrian and bicyclist safety education and opportunities to walk and bike and by practicing safety skills with their children.
- Drivers - to alert all drivers to the presence of walkers and bicyclists and the need to slow down.
- Law enforcement - to enhance pedestrian and bicyclist safety with school zone enforcement.
- Local officials - to identify changes needed to improve walking and bicycling conditions around schools.

**Teaching children walking and bicycling safety skills can help create lifelong traffic skills.**

**Physical activity**

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**Most kids aren't getting the exercise they need.**

- Among 9 to 13 year-old children, 61.5 percent do not engage in organized physical activity during non-school hours; 22.6 percent do not participate in any free-time physical activity.<sup>4</sup>
- As age or grade in school increases, physical activity participation drastically declines.<sup>5</sup>
- Experts recommend that children get at least 60 minutes of physical activity on most, preferably all, days of the week.<sup>6</sup>

**Less active children are more likely to be overweight.<sup>7</sup>**

**The percentage of overweight children aged 6 to 19 has approximately tripled over the past 30 years.**

- According to 1999 to 2000 data, almost 9 million (15 percent) children and teens in this age range are overweight.<sup>8</sup>

**Two recent studies have found that walking to school is associated with higher overall physical activity throughout the day.<sup>9 10</sup>**

**Research shows that overweight children are at increased risk of becoming overweight adults.<sup>11</sup>**

**Potential benefits of physical activity for youth include:<sup>12,13</sup>**

- Weight and blood pressure control
- Bone, muscle, and joint health and maintenance
- Reduction in the risk of diabetes
- Improved psychological welfare
- Better academic performance<sup>14</sup>

**Environment and air quality**

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**Each year, automobiles emit millions of tons of pollutants into the air.**

- Auto emissions have risen in many parts of the country as a result of the doubling of miles traveled over the past two decades.<sup>15</sup>

**Air pollutants can be especially harmful to children because their respiratory systems are still developing.**

- Air pollution can exacerbate chronic respiratory conditions, such as asthma.<sup>16</sup>
- The increases in rates of asthma in this country are alarming: Over the last 25 years, among children ages 5 to 14, there has been a 74 percent increase, and a 160 percent increase in children up to age 4.<sup>17</sup>
- In addition, 14 million days of school are missed every year due to asthma.<sup>18</sup>

**Schools placed in neighborhoods near residential areas with a good street and sidewalk network have more students arriving by bicycle and on foot. Air quality is measurably better at such locations.<sup>19</sup>**

**Schools today are often built on the edges of communities, making them too far for more kids to walk and bike compared to neighborhood schools.**

- The U.S. Department of Education estimates that the U.S. student enrollment will grow by over 1.7 million between 2000 and 2006.<sup>20</sup>
- As a result, many new schools will be constructed and the location of these schools can dictate whether students are able to walk or bike.

## **Safe Routes to School**

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**Safe Routes to School programs are sustained efforts by parents, other community members, community leaders and local, state, and federal governments to improve the health and well-being of children by enabling and encouraging them to walk and bicycle to school.**

- In July 2005, Congress passed federal legislation that established a national Safe Routes to School program. The program dedicates a total of \$612 million towards SR2S from 2005 to 2009.
- Several states have dedicated funds to Safe Routes to School programs.
- Many communities launch Safe Routes to School programs as a result of Walk to School events.

## **About Walk to School**

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- In 2005, more than 3,000 schools in the United States are estimated to participate in International Walk to School Day and Week. Approximately 3 million people from 37 countries will participate (see next section).
- Results from the 2004 Walk to School Coordinators survey revealed that over one-half of schools celebrate Walk to School as part of ongoing efforts to promote walking and bicycling. Coordinators also report that the most common reason to participate is physical activity / obesity prevention, a shift from past years, when participation was most often motivated by interest in pedestrian safety.
- Organizations supporting International Walk to School Day in the U.S. include the Active Living Network, America Walks, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Highway Administration, the Institute of Transportation Engineers, the National Center for Bicycling and Walking, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Safe Kids Worldwide, the National Safety Council, the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.
- The Partnership for a Walkable America founded Walk to School Day in the United States in 1997 and began with two events in two cities: Chicago and Los Angeles. Canada and Great Britain already had Walk to School events in place.

- Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States joined together in 2000 to create International Walk to School Day. Over 2.5 million walkers were estimated to have participated.
- International Walk to School Day received the Stockholm Partnership for Sustainable Cities Award in June 2003 from the King of Sweden.
- In early 2004, the first International Walk to School Award was received by Buckinghamshire County Council in partnership with Holmer Green First School in England. The Holmer Green First School reduced car use from 62 percent to 26 percent through an incentive program where children received stamps in a “passport” every time they walked to or from school. Children were then able to redeem the stamps for rewards.
- The second International Walk to School Award application period will open at the end of September. Visit [www.iwalktoschool.org](http://www.iwalktoschool.org) for more information.

## Participating Countries

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### **Africa**

Kenya  
Namibia  
Nigeria  
South Africa  
Zambia

### **Asia**

India  
Pakistan  
Philippines  
South Korea  
Taiwan

### **Australasia**

Australia  
New Zealand

### **Europe**

Belgium  
Croatia  
Cyprus  
Czech Republic  
Denmark  
France  
Germany  
Greece  
Ireland  
Israel  
Italy  
Liechtenstein  
Norway  
Spain  
Switzerland  
United Kingdom  
(Scotland, England,  
Wales)

### **South America**

Argentina  
Brazil  
Chile  
Columbia

### **North America**

Canada  
Mexico  
United States

New countries join International Walk to School throughout the year. See [www.iwalktoschool.org](http://www.iwalktoschool.org).

<sup>1</sup> US EPA. Travel and Environmental Implications of School Siting, October 2003. Accessed 9/16/05 at [http://www.epa.gov/livability/pdf/school\\_travel.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/livability/pdf/school_travel.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Parisi and Associates. Transportation tools to improve children's health and mobility: Look at what California is Doing. Accessed 9/16/05 at [http://www.lgc.org/freepub/PDF/Land\\_Use/fact\\_sheets/sr2s\\_transportation\\_tools.pdf](http://www.lgc.org/freepub/PDF/Land_Use/fact_sheets/sr2s_transportation_tools.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation.

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. YMC Longitudinal Survey, 2002. MMWR 52(53):785-788.

<sup>5</sup> US Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity and Health, 1996. Accessed 9/16/05 at [www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/sgr/adoles.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/sgr/adoles.htm).

<sup>6</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services and US Department of Agriculture, Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005. Accessed 9/16/05 at <http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines>.

<sup>7</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics (2003). Policy statement on the prevention of pediatric overweight and obesity. Accessed 9/16/05 at <http://www.aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatrics;112/2/424>.

<sup>8</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. Prevalence of Overweight Among Children and Adolescents: United States, 1999-2000.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander et al., The broader impact of walking to school among adolescents. BMJonline. Accessed 9/16/05 at [bmj.bmjournals.com](http://bmj.bmjournals.com)

<sup>10</sup> Cooper et al., Commuting to school: Are children who walk more physically active? Am J Prev Med 2003: 25 (4)

<sup>11</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Importance of Regular Physical Activity for Children. Accessed 9/16/05 at [http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/health\\_benefits.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/health_benefits.htm).

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<sup>12</sup> American Heart Association. Exercise (Physical Activity and Children). Accessed 9/16/05 at [www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4596](http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4596).

<sup>13</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Importance of Regular Physical Activity for Children. Accessed 9/16/05 at [http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/health\\_benefits.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/kidswalk/health_benefits.htm).

<sup>14</sup> California Department of Education. A study of the relationship between physical fitness and academic achievement in California using 2004 test results. Accessed 9/16/05 at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/pf/documents/2004pftresults.doc>.

<sup>15</sup> National Safety Council. What you can do about car emissions. Accessed 9/16/05 at [www.nsc.org/ehc/mobile/mse\\_fs.htm#problem](http://www.nsc.org/ehc/mobile/mse_fs.htm#problem).

<sup>16</sup> Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center. Air quality and the environment. Accessed 9/16/05 at [www.walktoschool.org/why/environment.cfm](http://www.walktoschool.org/why/environment.cfm).

<sup>17</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Surveillance for Asthma—United States, 1960-1995: CDC Surveillance Summaries, April 24, 1998. *MMWR Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, Vol. 47 (SS-1), 1998, pp. 1-27.

<sup>18</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Healthy Youth! Health Topics: Asthma. Accessed 9/16/05 at <http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/asthma/index.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> US EPA. Travel and Environmental Implications of School Siting, October 2003. Accessed 9/16/05 at [www.smartgrowth.umd.edu/pdf/SchoolLocationReport.pdf](http://www.smartgrowth.umd.edu/pdf/SchoolLocationReport.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> US EPA. Travel and Environmental Implications of School Siting, October 2003. Accessed 9/16/05 at [www.smartgrowth.umd.edu/pdf/SchoolLocationReport.pdf](http://www.smartgrowth.umd.edu/pdf/SchoolLocationReport.pdf).