



October Walk to School Month

Background Facts About Children's Health and Safety

CHILD BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN INJURY & DEATH:

- Pedestrian injuries and deaths are the second leading cause of death for 5 to 12 year olds in California, following motor vehicle occupant fatalities.¹
- Bicycle and pedestrian traffic injuries are a major threat to California's school age children (5 to 17 year olds). In 2008, these injuries caused 60 deaths. Another 937 were hospitalized and 5,024 were treated in emergency departments. Unfortunately, many of these injuries were to children trying to get to school or back home again.²
- Of children in California who reported problems walking to school, the top three problems they identified were:
 - Drivers do not yield to people crossing the street;
 - Drivers drove too fast; and
 - Sidewalks or paths start and stop abruptly.³

PUBLIC SUPPORT:

- Seventy percent of the public supports local, state, and federal funds to ensure the safety of children to walk or ride bicycles to school.⁴
- "I urge teachers, parents, and students across the Golden State to recognize the importance of physical fitness by walking to school. Community members can help by identifying pedestrian safety issues and advocating environmental and policy changes to create more walk-friendly neighborhoods. Together, we can ensure that children are able to lead healthy, active lifestyles."⁵

ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS:

- Motor vehicles are the largest source of air pollution in California.⁶
- Air quality is measurably better around schools with more walkers and bicyclists.⁷
- Research indicates that respiratory health in children is adversely affected by local exposures to outdoor freeway-related pollutants.⁸
- Long-term breathing in cities raises the risk of dying from lung cancer and is about as dangerous as living with a smoker.⁹

CHILDRENS' SEDENTARY LIFESTYLES:

- Nearly 40% of California's school children are overweight or obese.¹⁰
- In California, only 31% of 5 to 18 year old students walked, biked, or skated to school in the past week.¹¹
- In California, 46.8% of students who could walk or bike to school in half an hour or less do not walk or bike to school.¹¹
- Children who walk or bicycle to school have higher daily levels of physical activity and better cardiovascular fitness than do children who do not actively commute to school.¹²
- Nationwide, only 34.7% of students met the recommended levels of physical activity of at least 60 minutes per day on 5 or more days of the week.¹³

Footnotes:

- 1) California Department of Public Health. Vital Statistics Death Statistical Master File, 2007.
- 2) California Department of Public Health, EpiCenter Database. Run date: August 19, 2010.
- 3) California Department of Health Services. Unpublished Walk to School Day checklist data, 1999.
- 4) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Unpublished calculations from HealthStyles Survey, 2002.
- 5) California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. September 30, 2005.
- 6) California Environmental Protection Agency, Air Resources Board website. Accessed August 2010.
- 7) Environmental Protection Agency. *Travel and Environmental Implications of School Siting*, 2003.
- 8) Epidemiology. *Childhood asthma and exposure to traffic and nitrogen dioxide*, 2005.
- 9) Journal of the American Medical Association. *Lung cancer, cardiopulmonary mortality, and long-term exposure to fine particulate air pollution*, 2002.
- 10) Pediatrics. *Disparities in peaks, plateaus, and declines in prevalence of high BMI among adolescents*, 2010.
- 11) University of California Los Angeles, Center for Health Policy Research. California Health Interview Survey, 2007.
- 12) Preventing Chronic Disease. *Children's active commuting to school: Current knowledge and future directions*, 2008.
- 13) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance, 2007.

Information about Walk to School is available at: www.cawalktoschool.com

