

## Walk and Roll Safely to School

By:

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Summer is over and classes have begun, and an important question we can ask is, "How do my kids get to and from school?" According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 50% of all children walked to school in 1969. Today, less than 15% of America's children walk or bike to school. The lack of physical activity and the excessive use of cars are taking their toll. Childhood obesity levels and asthma rates continue to rise and more cars on the road lead to more child pedestrian injuries and fatalities.

There are many great reasons for kids to ride their bikes and walk to school. With the decline in physical activity in school and overall, walking or biking to school gives children the exercise they need. Adults should be physically active for at least 30 minutes every day, and children need 1 hour of physical activity per day plus another 20 minutes of vigorous activity several days per week. Walking and biking to school also gives kids independence and responsibility, lets them explore their neighborhood, and helps them arrive at school alert and ready for the day. A study by the California Department of Education has shown that children who are physically active actually perform better in school.

By getting children on bikes or walking, schools also reduce traffic. According to local studies in Marin County, 21-27% of all morning traffic is related to parents driving their kids to school. Reducing the number of kids dropped off in cars makes schools safer and creates a cleaner environment.

Parents can help their child find a safe route to school by walking the neighborhood with their child and teaching them the best course. Parents can get physical activity as well by walking or biking with their child to school, or neighborhoods or apartment complexes may want to work together to create a meeting point to walk or bike to school as a group. If there is a safety hazard that prohibits your child from walking or biking to school, contact the Safe Kids Sonoma County at 565-6680 to help connect you with resources to affect change.

On Wednesday, October 4, 2006, we will celebrate International Walk to School Day. Many schools around the county will be organizing special events. Please contact your school to inquire about their event or to help set up an event. Even though we celebrate on October 4<sup>th</sup>, walking and biking to school is a great activity that you could help your child do every day!

Children learn from adults. Please be a good role model and show kids how to be a safe bicyclist and pedestrian by your own actions. Some safety tips to keep in mind if your child is walking or biking to school:

### Pedestrians

- **Always Cross at the corner.** Use signals and crosswalks when available.
- **Stop and look left, right, and left again** before crossing an intersection.
- **Walk on the sidewalks or paths.** If there are no sidewalks, walk facing traffic and to the left.

- **Never run into the street for any reason.** Teach children not to chase a ball, a pet, or anything else.
- **Teach kids to cross 10 feet in front of the school bus, never behind.**

#### Bicyclists

- **Always wear a bike helmet.** It is a law that children need to wear their helmets until age 18. However, it is ALWAYS a good idea to wear a helmet and parents can help model good practices by also wearing a helmet.
- **Ride right with traffic.** Teach your children to ride with traffic, not against it, as far to the right as possible.
- **Follow the Rules of the Road.** Bicycles are vehicles on the road just like cars. Bikes also need to obey all stop signs and red lights.
- **Look back and yield to traffic coming from behind before turning left at an intersection.**
- **Don't ride in the dark.** If it is unavoidable, wear reflective clothes or accessories and make sure your bike has lights and reflectors.