MedicalXpress

Parents 'need to be convinced' to let children walk to school

May 22 2014

Parents need to be convinced about the benefits of their children walking or cycling to school as much as the children themselves, according to research led at the University of Strathclyde.

A study of children's habits in commuting to and from school discovered that, in the vast majority of cases, parents were the main decision makers in how the children travelled.

Colder weather in autumn and winter led to a drop in the number of children in an intervention group, who were being encouraged to walk and cycle more, and the control group, who continued their normal journeys. However, the decrease was far less marked in the intervention group.

Dr David Rowe, a Reader in Exercise Science in the University of Strathclyde's School of Psychological Sciences and Health, led the research. He said: "Exercise is an indispensable part of children's health and wellbeing and is vital in tackling the increasing obesity problem worldwide. The journey between school and home provides an ideal opportunity for physical activity but it is by no means always taken.

"It may be that parents want their children to travel by car or bus for their safety. This is perfectly understandable but it also means that they can miss out on a great deal of beneficial physical activity and it could be that the children want to walk or cycle themselves."

The assessment of 166 children, with an average age of nine, and 143 parents measured the children's steps to and from school, as well as gaining further details about travelling from a questionnaire.

Around half of the children walked to school, while just over half walked home. The children walked for an average of 1,627 steps- around one mile- a day.

The study forms part of the wider Strathclyde Evaluation of Children's Active Travel (SE-CAT), a continuing programme with partners at the Universities of Aberdeen, Brighton and Derby. The project focuses on active travel to and from school by children between the ages of eight and nine.

Dr Rowe added: "We would recommend that measures aimed at increasing walking to school should be targeted not only to older children, who may be in a position to make their own decisions, but also to parents of younger children, as they will have the final say on how their child travels."

Dr Rowe presented on the research at the Global Summit on the Physical Activity of Children in Toronto on Wednesday 21 May.

Strathclyde Evaluation of Children's Active Travel is linked to Travelling Green, a walking project available to schools through Sustrans, the Scottish Government-funded charity promoting travel on foot, by bicycle and by public transport.

Provided by University of Strathclyde, Glasgow

Citation: Parents 'need to be convinced' to let children walk to school (2014, May 22) retrieved 19 April 2024 from

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.