

# Urban children are healthier commuters than rural teens

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The children most likely to walk or cycle to school live in urban areas, with a single parent, and in an economically disadvantaged home, according to survey results that were published in *Pediatrics* today by Dr. Roman Pabayo of the University of Montreal Hospital Research Centre and the university's Department of Social and preventive medicine. Pabayo's study is unique in that it follows the same group of children as they age throughout the school years, and it shows that children increasingly use "active transport" to travel to school until they reach ten or eleven years of age, at which point the trend then reverses.

"The study is important for the well-being of children because most children are not meeting [physical activity guidelines](#) needed for optimal growth and development," Pabayo explained. "Active transportation to school represents an affordable and easy way to incorporate physical activity in the daily routines of children. In a separate study on children in Quebec, we have actually found significant associations between weight and whether the child cycles or walks to school." The term active transportation relates to [physical exertion](#), and excludes public transportation, school buses and driving.

The study looked at the habits of 7690 Canadian children, and it revealed that a variety of interesting factors are associated with transport choice. For example, children of parents who reported that their child had many friends in their area were more than twice as likely to increase their active commuting over two years in comparison to other children. [Adolescents](#) were less likely to increase their active transportation if

there were no traffic lights or pedestrian crossings on their route to school. Whether a child has someone with whom to commute or older [siblings](#) were found to be particularly influential.

Future studies must be undertaken to explain these trends and factors identified in the study. "Why are children from Saskatchewan and Manitoba the most likely to use active transport at a given point in their lives? What about children from poorer backgrounds? Why are there different patterns as children age across socio-demographic and regional lines? If we can gain a better understanding of the factors that influence how children get to school, we may be able to encourage more families to bike or walk to school, leading to lifelong healthy behaviors," Pabayo said.

**More information:**

[www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2010-1612](http://www.pediatrics.org/cgi/doi/10.1542/peds.2010-1612)

Provided by University of Montreal

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