



State of North Carolina
Department of Health and Human Services

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N.C. Division of Public Health Encourages Communities to Assess Kids' Ability to Walk or Bike Safely

RALEIGH— How safe is your community for children to walk or bike to school? Parents and communities can now use a new Web-based tool to assess their community's safety for walking and biking, and can find suggestions for making their community safer for those activities. The assessment tool and tips are on the www.EatSmartMoveMoreNC.com Web site.

April 3-9 is National Public Health Week. This year's theme is Designing Healthy Communities, Raising Healthy Kids. It is a week dedicated to raising awareness of the impact that roads, sidewalks and school location have on children's health, especially obesity prevention.

"Most communities today were designed mainly for automobile travel, and usually do not have many sidewalks or bicycle lanes," said Jimmy Newkirk, physical activity coordinator for the N.C. Division of Public Health. "Building roads, schools, shopping centers and other places of interest for convenient access by car often keeps people from walking, riding bicycles or playing outdoors safely," Newkirk added.

North Carolina has very low numbers of school children walking and biking to school, and the state has higher than average child obesity rates.

The 2005 Child Health Assessment and Monitoring Program survey, reaching nearly 2000 North Carolina households with children age 17 and younger between January and August 2005, found that while 18.2 percent of children live less than two miles from school, less than four percent report walking or biking to school any day of the week.

The same survey showed that the majority of North Carolina parents (79.7 percent) believe child overweight to be a very serious or serious issue in his or her community.

Meanwhile, the prevalence of overweight in children is on the rise in North Carolina. 2005 North Carolina Nutrition and Physical Activity Surveillance System data show that 27.9 percent of youth age 12 to 18 and 24.49 percent of kids 5 to 11 are overweight.

"Changing the neighborhood environment – adding sidewalks where there are none, making sidewalks that exist feel safer by adding a tree barrier, for example, and using traffic-calming measures such as narrower streets—help make communities safer for pedestrians," said Newkirk. "We have a real need in North Carolina to educate parents, school personnel, and city and county decision makers that these kinds of changes go a long way in supporting long-term behavior change for both children and adults, leading to a reduced risk of obesity," Newkirk added.

For more information on Walk to School programs or creating neighborhoods that support increased physical activity, visit www.EatSmartMoveMoreNC.com, click on the blue "Professionals" button or the purple "Consumers" button.

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