

Walk NEBRASKA

Kids and Walking

The health benefits of walking aren't limited to adults. While adults may "go for a walk" or "walk for health" more often than kids, walking is an excellent form of physical activity during childhood. Physical activity during childhood helps build and maintain healthy bones, manage weight, reduce stress, and prevent and/or delay the development of chronic disease. Encouraging kids to walk to and from activities and school can form a habit that leads to a lifetime of walking for fun and health.

Thirty years ago, the sight of children walking or biking to school was common. Nearly 90% of children who lived within a mile of school walked or biked to school. In recent years, that rate has declined dramatically. Parents of school children most commonly report several barriers to their children walking or biking to school. These include:

- Distance to school: While it may be true that fewer children live within one mile of their school due to fewer neighborhood schools, the rate of children who live within one mile of their school and walk/bike to school has also declined.
- Traffic danger: The volume of traffic has increased over the last thirty years, but the pedestrian injury/death rate has declined. Perhaps both of these changes is due to the fact that more kids are being driven to school and fewer are walking.
- Adverse weather conditions: Although weather patterns might have changed a small amount in thirty years, this change is not great enough to influence behavior change.
- Fear of crimes against children: While there is no trend data for younger children, the risk of violent crimes against youth aged 12–19 years has actually dropped in the past 30 years and of those numbers, the rate of youth abduction is low in school areas.

What can families, communities, and schools do to increase kids walking or biking to school? Check out the following resources:

- **KidsWalk-to-School:** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has a program, "KidsWalk-to-School", that advocates for communities to build partnerships with the school, PTA, local police department, businesses, and others to create an environment that is supportive of walking and biking to school safely. Resources include a community presentation, fact sheets, brochures and other resources. Information about "KidsWalk-to-School" can be accessed on the CDC website, www.cdc.gov.
- **Safe Routes to School:** This program encourages structural improvements in communities to make walking and biking to school safer, and it educates kids about their responsibilities to stay safe on their way to and from school. Resources, success stories, and funding opportunities are available at www.saferoutesinfo.org.

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Know how. Know now.



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