

# Children's Health



## Safe Routes To School

(NAPSA)—According to an old Spanish proverb, you “make the road by walking it.” Now, millions of Americans have added a new meaning to that phrase. They’re walking and biking to help create safer routes and paths for walking and bicycling.

### Why It's Needed

With childhood obesity rates at record highs and school systems offering fewer gym classes, recess time and school-funded sports programs, the commute to school can be a great way to get kids active. Consider this: In 1969, about 50 percent of schoolchildren walked or bicycled to school, while today, fewer than 15 percent do. Over the years, obesity rates have soared among children of all ages in the United States and approximately 25 million children and adolescents—more than 33 percent—are now overweight or obese or at risk of becoming so.

### What's To Be Done

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) recommends that elementary school students have 150 minutes of instructional physical education per week while middle and high school students have 225 minutes per week of instructional physical education. Since kids are only receiving a portion of that physical exercise time in school, they must seek alternate activities to meet these and the Surgeon General's recommended levels of physical activity in daily life.

To help, Safe Routes to School National Partnership has created a diverse national community of organizations that advocates for safe bicycling and walking to and from schools throughout the United States.



**Walking or riding a bike to and from school can be a great way for kids to keep fit—as long as the route they take is safe and they know the rules of the road.**

### Travel Safely

Ways to increase the safety of a child's walking or biking trip to school include:

- Teach children to cross streets at marked crossings and to always look left-right-left.

- Young bicyclists should practice the route to school with a parent and know the rules of the road, how to signal and when it is safest to walk their bike.

- Tie and tuck. Don't let shoelaces or pant legs get caught in the spokes.

- Make sure the bike's tires have enough air, the brakes and gears work, the chain isn't loose and bolts are tight.

- Bicyclists should wear light-colored clothing and reflective gear.

- Young riders should always wear their helmets. It should be properly adjusted, fitted and buckled.

- See that the community provides safe, well-maintained walkways separate from vehicles and that it installs curb ramps at every intersection and at mid-block crossings.

### Learn More

For further information, go to [www.saferoutespartnership.org](http://www.saferoutespartnership.org).