

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2015 September 17

ACTIVE AND SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

Recommendation

It is recommended that Report No. 51-15 re Active and Safe Routes to School be received for information.

Key Points

- Active & Safe Routes to School (ASRTS) is a community partnership working together to encourage children and families to choose active transportation (AT) for the improvement of children's health, safety and the environment.
- Wednesday, October 7th, 2015 is International Walk to School Day (iWalk), where schools across the region will be celebrating and raising awareness about the benefits of walking to school.

Only 7% of Canadian children (9% of boys and 4% of girls) achieve the recommended 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous daily physical activity necessary to prevent obesity and the related health concerns.

On Wednesday, October 7th, 2015, schools across the region will be celebrating International Walk to School Day (iWalk), an event that takes place every October to raise awareness about walking to school. Active & Safe Routes to School (ASRTS) is a community partnership to encourage children and families to choose active transportation. For schools involved in ASRTS's overarching program, School Travel Planning (STP), iWalk is an opportunity to run fun events and activities to inspire more children and parents to walk to school.

ASRTS is made up of community partners from the Counties of Middlesex, Elgin, and Oxford, and the cities of London and St. Thomas, including municipal planning and transportation departments, police, non-profits, school board trustees and staff members, school communities, and three local health units. Data collection and evaluation through a partnership with the Human Environments Analysis Laboratory (HEAL) of Western University provides local evidence to support policy making.

Active Transportation

Active Transportation (AT), defined as any form of human-powered travel such as walking or biking, to and from school, provides an ideal way for children to increase their physical activity levels. Increased active travel also provides the additional benefits of improving children's mental health, improving traffic and safety around schools, improving air quality and the environment, helping students arrive to school alert and ready to learn, and allowing children to feel more connected to their community.

The number of Canadian children using AT to school has decreased nearly 50% in the last 20 years. Local data collected through STP found an average of 52% of children using AT to travel to school and 48% using passive modes, such as a car or bus. Of those using passive modes, 54% are being driven in a personal vehicle, which can lead to traffic congestion, poor air quality, and makes the school environment less safe

for children. ASRTS is working to identify and target the barriers preventing families from choosing AT or taking the bus in order to increase the benefits to local students.

School Travel Planning

School Travel Planning (STP) is the overarching program implemented by ASRTS and encourages AT to and from school by developing an action plan to build upon strengths and to remove barriers around the school. STP is a comprehensive process that requires school ownership, supportive partnerships, identification of school-specific concerns (not one-approach-fits-all), and ongoing action plans.

Outcomes

In 2011/2012, seven local schools participated in a pilot STP study funded and coordinated by Green Communities Canada. In 2013, the study process was adapted by ASRTS in partnership with the HEALab to gather better-quality information through a more rigorous data collection phase. Sixteen additional tri-County schools have since participated in the revised STP process over the past 2 school years.

Results of the data collection phase, which includes parent and youth surveys, traffic counts, and school walkabouts, have identified barriers to using AT under the following categories: traffic, infrastructure, weather, and personal factors. Schools involved in the action plan implementation phase address barriers through the 5 E's: Engineering (e.g. new or improved sidewalk renovation); Education (e.g. safety education or bike skills training); Encouragement (e.g. Walk & Wheel promotion days with incentives); Enforcement (e.g. parking or anti-idling blitz); and Evaluation.

Moving Forward

In Fall 2015, we will start conducting the second round of data collection for schools entering the evaluation phase. Data from STPs are being used to provide policy recommendations to government and educational entities for sustainable and long-term change. To date, opportunities have included:

- Presentations to TVDSB and LDCSB;
- Participation on London's Community Safety and Crime Prevention Advisory Committee;
- Meetings with key decision makers; and
- Input into policies, such as, reduced-speed school zones and #CycleON through the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario.

Evidence shows that children require 60 minutes of physical activity per day. STP and AT to and from school enhance children's levels of physical activity, which is good for the health of our children and the community.

This report was prepared by Ms. Emily Van Kesteren, Public Health Nurse.



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