

MEDIA RELEASE

Only 25% of students regularly walk to school Girls less likely to disobey road safety rules and take risks

17 May 2012: As children around Australia gear up for National Walk Safely to School Day tomorrow, research released today by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) shows that while boys have slightly greater awareness of road safety rules, girls are more likely to obey them.

The research, by ACER Research Fellow Ms Catherine Underwood, examined whether walking to school has an effect on children's physical activity and ability to move through their neighbourhood without adult supervision, also known as independent mobility.

More than 800 Victorian primary school students aged between 8 and 12 years participated in the research, of which 25 per cent reported they regularly walked to school.

Of those who said they walk to school, 94 per cent of boys and 91 per cent of girls reported that they know the road safety rules.

However, girls were more likely than boys to report that they look right and left before crossing the road (81 per cent of girls vs. 77 per cent of boys) and stop before crossing the road (86 per cent of girls vs. 69 per cent of boys). Girls were less likely than boys to report taking risks such as crossing the road away from the school crossing in order to save time (23 per cent of girls vs. 36 per cent of boys) and crossing the road next to a parked car (37 per cent of girls vs. 42 per cent of boys).

Ms Underwood said walking to school increases children's knowledge of their neighbourhood and has a positive influence on their health, and academic performance. In another aspect of the survey, school principals reported that their teachers observed students who actively commuted to school were more physically active in the playground. In the classroom, those students were more alert, confident, mature, and had higher levels of concentration which enhanced their academic performance.

"Research has shown that physical activity such as walking to school has a positive life-long impact on children, including greater cognitive, intellectual and social skills. More specifically, studies have found physical activity increases students' ability to pay attention, be alert and concentrate in class which in turn enhances academic performance," she said.

Despite such evidence of the benefits walking to school can provide, Ms Underwood's research revealed only 15 per cent of children surveyed reported walking to school five days a week, with nine per cent walking to school three or four days per week.

Sixty-two per cent of children surveyed reported being driven to school five days a week. These children were slightly less likely to report knowing the road safety rules (90 per cent) compared to students who walk to school (93 per cent).

Analysis was based on data looking at children's independent mobility and active transport collected in 2010 with funding from VicHealth.

*****ENDS*****

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