

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

27 January, 2011

Dear Sir/Madam,

As another school year begins, the roads become a lot busier, not with children walking to school, but with parents ferrying them there by car. From an environmental, social and physical health perspective, this is bad news.

The rate of children walking to school has declined dramatically since the early 1970s. Then, nearly 40 per cent of children walked, now it is estimated to be a low as 15 per cent.

This decline is a lost opportunity for physical activity. Children require one hour of physical activity a day for good health. Little wonder we face a childhood obesity epidemic.

Parents play a key role in putting their children on track to better health from a young age. Recent VicHealth research shows that children who walk to school are better off physically, and enjoy increased social and mental wellbeing.

Children who grow up walking with their parents have greater awareness and confidence to negotiate traffic when they are ready to walk on their own.

Encouraging our children to walk more is not only a parental responsibility, it is a community responsibility. We cannot expect parents to let their children walk while the rest of us hop in the car for the shortest trips.

As individuals, we need to walk more and encourage others to do the same. More people walking will make our streets more vibrant, safer and improve our sense of community.

If you drive, drive slowly around neighbourhood streets – children walking to school need to feel safe.

This new year, let's all commit to supporting parents to get their children walking.

Dr Ben Rossiter
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