



News Release

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May 24 is Spokane County Walk to School Day

SPOKANE, Wash. – A convergence of issues ranging from childhood obesity to environmental pollution to rising fuel prices are pushing families to rethink how they travel, including the daily trip to school. For these reasons and the added health benefits of walking, [Spokane Regional Health District](#) (SRHD) is encouraging families to participate in Spokane County Walk to School Day on May 24.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that only 13 percent of children walk to school today, compared with 66 percent in 1970. Not to mention the fact that 50 percent of students living within ½ mile of school are being driven to school. In turn, 10 percent of adolescents in Spokane County in 2010 were obese and another 13 percent were overweight. Obesity and lack of activity contribute to chronic diseases including diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers.

Additionally, making walking routes safer is foundational to Spokane County Walk to School Day. For the past several months, SRHD partnered with school administrators, teachers, parents, and kids to do elementary school walk audits and identify possible areas of concern for kids walking to school. Included in the audits were the condition of sidewalks and the ability to see and be seen by motorists, conditions of crosswalks, signage for crossing and school zones, as well as pleasantness of the walk, which covers areas children may find intimidating such as barking dogs close to sidewalks, abandoned homes or garbage-filled areas.

Based on these audits, SRHD staff worked with several school principals to designate the best available routes to get to school, as well as a list of recommendations that went to cities in Spokane County, school administration, law enforcement, parents and students to consider for making their walk to school safer.

Other characteristics of a recommended route to school include:

1. Limiting the number of road crossings so that students cross in groups
2. Using sidewalks or paths with widest shoulders if no sidewalk available
3. Using the least hazardous roads based on traffic speed, volume and buffer zone (3 feet)

SRHD, law enforcement, Spokane Community Oriented Policing (SCOPE), and various cities' engineers and planners are working with numerous schools in Spokane County in honor of the event, encouraging students, parents, teachers, community leaders, and possibly a mascot or two to walk and roll to school on May 24. The day has potential to positively impact the lives of 26,551 students among five school districts.

Media are invited on May 24 to Otis Orchards Elementary School, 22000 E. Wellesley Ave., Otis Orchards, to witness their celebration of the event, including one of at least three walking school buses happening that day. A walking school bus is when a parent or responsible adult walks with children to school, and formally or informally, coordinates with other parents to pick up children along the way.

If you have questions about how you can participate, contact SRHD's health program specialist for its Physical Activity and Nutrition program, Natalie Tauzin, by emailing ntauzin@spokanecounty.org. More information is also available at www.srhd.org. SRHD's website offers comprehensive, updated information about Spokane Regional Health District and its triumphs in making Spokane a safer and healthier community.

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