

Going back to school

Advice for parents on keeping safe on the journey to school




Have you thought about how you will get your children to and from school when it is time to return? Are you considering changing the way you travel?


Sustrans' Active Journeys programme is aware many families have been enjoying walking, running, scooting and cycling as part of their daily exercise. It's a great opportunity to keep this going when schools go back. Our surveys show that pupils would prefer to travel actively if they were given the choice. The surveys we carry out with pupils, for example, show that over one-third of pupils want to cycle to school and a massive majority are positive about travelling actively.


Children enjoy being active. They arrive at school fresh and ready to learn. The streets around school are safer with less congestion. It's healthy for us all and it's also good for the planet (and doesn't create air pollution around the school). It's a chance to chat and share things as a family.

Many of us have experienced how we can maintain distance from others while travelling actively, including making use of the quieter roads even if that is to briefly step into them to move around people. Hopefully we can keep travelling actively, but the roads may get busier, so there is some advice overleaf so we can do this safely.

We think active travel will be an important tool in tackling Covid-19. Collectively we will be healthier and stronger. Studies have linked severity of Covid-19 symptoms to poor air quality, which is made worse if there is lots of traffic around the school.

 The majority of primary school children in the UK walk to school, with average trip distances less than 1.5 miles (20-30 minute walk).

 15 minutes of exercise (including a walk, scoot or cycle to school) can improve a child's mood.

 Active travel to school can increase a child's concentration level by up to 4 hours.

Sustrans is the charity making it easier for people to walk and cycle.

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Advice on Social Distancing on the Journey to School

When schools return, the pavements and roads may become busier again. Here are some ideas to help you feel comfortable travelling actively to school:

- Give yourself a bit more time in the morning. People walking, running, scooting and cycling tend to arrive at school over a longer time period. This makes it easier to manage limited space on the roads and paths around school.
- Vary your route if you can. This can be more interesting and pleasant, especially if you can stay away from busy roads. Try and find the route less travelled.
- Stop and wait for people to pass (and say hello). Look for wider areas of the path, for example at junctions and feel confident about using other people's driveways so people can pass.
- Remind children about slowing, stopping and giving space, especially if they are scooting and cycling. They might make mistakes, but try not to get angry, just remind them that it's really important right now.
- If you do have to step in the road to pass people, reinforce looking and listening with your family. Looking and listening is how we understand the world around us, so the more looking and listening we do by the roads the better decisions we make.
- Try and give older children (Y4 and above) responsibility for getting themselves to and from school. You might prefer to arrange to meet them near the school (outside the library or a shop). This helps their road confidence and reduces the amount of people around the school.

What You Can Do

If you live too far away to travel actively or don't feel it is possible for you, please try and park and stride, ideally using an off-street car park, perhaps 5-10 minutes away from school. That way, your children still get the benefits of active travel.

If you think the footpaths are not wide enough, talk to the school's head teacher and your local authority. Many local authorities have an online resource where you can report problems directly to their Highways team. It may be possible to reallocate road or parking bay space as has happened elsewhere in the country. There may be opportunities to widen footpaths, try pop-up cycle lanes and close the roads around schools to traffic during drop-off and pick-up times. It is your ideas that make it happen.

Stay in touch with us. Share your ideas and concerns. We can work with local authority officers and school staff.

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