

Active Community Environments

What are Active Community Environments?

Active Community Environments (ACES) are places where people of all ages and abilities can easily enjoy walking, bicycling, and other forms of recreation. These areas:

- Support and promote physical activity.
- Have sidewalks, on-street bicycle facilities, multi-use paths and trails, parks, open space, and recreational facilities.
- Promote mixed-use development and a connected grid of streets, allowing homes, work, schools, and stores to be close together and accessible by walking and bicycling.

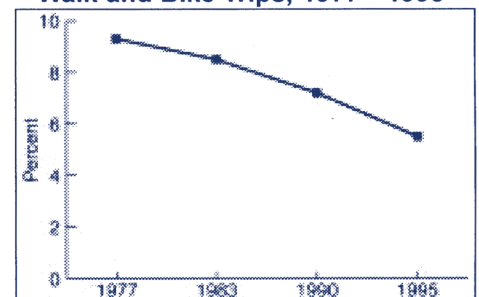
Most communities today were designed to favor one mode of travel—the automobile—and usually do not have many sidewalks or bicycle facilities. Building roads, schools, shopping centers, and other places of interest only for convenient access by cars often keeps people from safely walking around town, riding bicycles, or playing outdoors. This is one important reason why people in the United States are not as active as they used to be.

- Between 1977 and 1995, trips made by walking declined while driving trips increased.¹ (See charts at right.)
- One-fourth of all trips people make are one mile or less, but three-fourths of these short trips are made by car.¹
- Children between the ages of 5 and 15 do not walk or ride their bicycles as much as they used to (40% less from 1977 to 1995).¹ For school trips one mile or less, only 31% are made by walking; within two miles, just 2% of school trips are made by bicycling.²

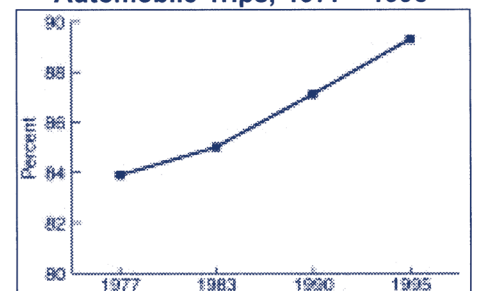
These trends pose an important public health problem when the effects of physical inactivity and excess weight are considered.

- Physical inactivity and unhealthy eating are risk behaviors that contribute to at least 300,000 preventable deaths each year.³
- Almost a third (29%) of adults get little or no exercise (they are sedentary), and almost three-fourths (73%) are not active enough.⁴ (Engaging in 30 minutes of physical activity at least 5 days per week is recommended.)
- More than 3 in 10 adults are overweight.⁴
- More than a third (36%) of young people in grades 9-12 do not participate in vigorous activities 3 or more days a week,⁵ and one-fourth (25%) of those aged 6-17 are overweight.⁶

Walk and Bike Trips, 1977—1995



Automobile Trips, 1977—1995



What are the benefits of Active Community Environments?

ACES have the potential to help people be more physically active. This is because they give people more (and safer) places to walk, ride bicycles, and enjoy other recreational activities.

- People are more active in neighborhoods that are perceived as safe. Of those who report living in unsafe neighborhoods, about half of women and the elderly are inactive.⁴
- In neighborhoods with square city blocks, people walk up to three times more than in neighborhoods with cul-de-sac streets or other features that keep streets from connecting.⁷
- Up to twice as many people may walk or cycle in neighborhoods that are transit-oriented than in neighborhoods that are auto-oriented.^{7,8}
- People are more likely to be physically active if they have recreational facilities close to their homes.^{7,8}

What is CDC doing to promote Active Community Environments?

CDC and its Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity are taking the lead in promoting ACES. Their activities include:

- Development of a guide (KidsWalk-to-School) to promote walking and bicycling to school.
- Collaboration with public and private agencies to promote National and International Walk-to-School Day (www.walktoschool-usa.org and www.iwalktoschool.org).
- Development of an ACES manual to help state and local public health workers develop similar initiatives.
- A partnership with the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program to promote the development and use of close-to-home parks and recreational facilities (www.ncrc.nps.gov/rtca/index.htm).
- Collaboration on an Atlanta-based study to review the relationships of land use, transportation, air quality, and physical activity.
- Collaboration with the Environmental Protection Agency on a national survey to study attitudes of the American public toward the environment, walking, and bicycling.

References

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For more information...

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