



News Release

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#HealthiestNextGen: Walking and Biking to School Helps Everyone

National Bike to School Day includes Transportation Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Health

OLYMPIA — Hundreds of students across Washington will feel the wind on their faces as they pump their legs riding to and from school on May 6 as part of [National Bike to School Day](#).

Students from Pioneer Elementary School in Olympia will be joined on their morning ride by Washington Department of Transportation Secretary Lynn Peterson and Deputy Secretary for Public Health Operations Dennis Worsham from the Department of Health. Biking to school gets children active — one of the goals of the Healthiest Next Generation Initiative, a partnership between the departments of Health and Early Learning and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Gov. Jay Inslee [launched the Healthiest Next Generation Initiative](#) to join in with families across the state to make our next generation the healthiest ever. The initiative's goal is to help children maintain a healthy weight, enjoy active lives, and eat well in places where they spend the most time — including early learning settings, schools, and their communities.

“One of the most important aspects of supporting the healthiest next generation is encouraging our kids to be active,” Inslee said. “Biking to school is one of the healthiest ways to start the day. Let’s get our kids rolling!”

In addition to helping kids reach the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity most days of the week, biking to school also helps to reduce air pollution from cars and traffic congestion. Healthy children also learn better. Learn more about [the impact of walking and biking to school](#) through this brief from Departments of Health and Transportation.

National Bike to School Day is also a great opportunity to remind families and kids how to ride safely. Washington’s [Safe Routes to School Program](#) has successfully helped more children walk

and bike to school safely, reduced congestion around schools and improved air quality. Since 2005, it has made walking and biking conditions safer for about 100,000 children at 230 schools. Approximately \$55 million has been awarded to 140 projects that have resulted in a 20 percent increase in the number of children biking and walking to school. The [Governor's Transportation Investment Package](#) that he released in December increased funding for Safe Routes to School by \$80 million.

In line with safety, it's important for all bicyclists, especially children, to wear properly fitted bicycle helmets every time they ride. A helmet is the single most effective way to prevent head injury resulting from a bicycle crash.

Kids and parents should ride on the right side of the road – with traffic, not against it. Stay as far to the right as possible. Use appropriate hand signals and respect traffic signals. Stop at all stop signs and stoplights. It's important that riders make eye contact with drivers to make sure drivers are paying attention and are going to stop before they cross the street.

When riding at dusk, dawn or in the evening, make sure to use lights – including reflectors as well. It's also smart to wear clothes and accessories that have retro-reflective materials to improve visibility to motorists. Parents and guardians should supervise children until they're comfortable that kids are responsible enough to ride on their own.

“A child's health and the health of their environment have a direct influence on their success in school,” said Worsham, deputy secretary at the health department. “Promoting healthy habits now can help to create healthy habits that will last a lifetime. We're thrilled to also be partnering with the Washington State Department of Transportation to celebrate an active and safe start to the school day.”

[Pioneer Elementary School](#) is a K-5 school in the Olympia School District. Pioneer's Principal Randy Weeks will be joining the morning ride. Participating students will receive prizes to encourage them to keep riding.

Check out the [Department of Health's page about Healthiest Next Generation Initiative](#) or join us at #HealthiestNextGen.