

# Active Travel to School

## Data Snapshot

All graphs produced by Public Health Wales using the School Health Research Network Student Health and Well-being Survey.

Physical Activity Programme  
Public Health Wales  
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Wales

**Active Travel to School** (ATS) has multiple health, social and economic benefits for individuals and communities. Increasing ATS can increase physical activity levels, improve air quality and have positive impacts on climate change.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Children and young people who participate in ATS are more active overall than those who travel to school by car or bus and can achieve up to 48% of their recommended weekly physical activity guidelines.<sup>4</sup> ATS can also help children develop self-confidence; skills in assessing and managing risk; problem solving and social skills.<sup>3,5</sup>

International research and policy analysis confirms that multi-component interventions (e.g. built environment interventions combined with behavioural and/or educational interventions) generally produce larger and more consistent increases in ATS levels than single component approaches.<sup>6,7,8</sup>

The School Health Research Network (SHRN) Student Health and Well-being Survey reports that **40% of primary school learners** and **33% of secondary school learners actively travel to school** with considerable ATS variation across local authorities, age, sex, ethnicity and family affluence levels. Despite distance being only one of the key determinants for ATS<sup>9</sup> it has been estimated at a national level that around 80% of primary school children and 65% of secondary school children live within their respective statutory walking distances of 2 and 3 miles, under the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008.<sup>10</sup>

Schools, local and national stakeholders are making considerable efforts to promote ATS, yet **the data presented in this summary reveal persistent inequalities** by age, family affluence, and local authority. The findings highlight the need for targeted, context-specific strategies and interventions to ensure equitable participation to active travel opportunities across diverse educational settings.<sup>11</sup> This activity and impetus for improvement must be embedded within a strategic approach to ATS in Wales, across multiple disciplines and policy areas<sup>12</sup> drawing on the assets of various partners in the true spirit of shared responsibility.<sup>13</sup>

## Headline figures

### Primary School Learners, aged 7-11.

- **39.7%** (LCI: 39.3, UCI: 40.2) of learners (boys and girls) actively travel to school (walking or cycling).
- **39.9%** (LCI: 39.3, UCI: 40.6) of boys actively travel to school (walking or cycling).
- **39.5%** (LCI: 38.9, UCI: 40.1) of girls actively travel to school (walking or cycling).

#### Data source:

The SHRN Student Health and Well-Being Survey in Primary Schools 2024:

- 510 primary schools took part, representing 42% of all state maintained primary schools in Wales.
- 51,662 learners in years 3 to 6 completed the survey, representing 37% of all state maintained primary school learners in Wales.

### Secondary School Learners, aged 11-16.

- **33.2%** (LCI: 32.9, UCI: 33.4) of learners (boys and girls) actively travel to school (walking or cycling).
- **35.4%** (LCI: 39, UCI: 35.7) of boys actively travel to school (walking or cycling).
- **30.9%** (LCI: 30.6, UCI: 31.3) of girls actively travel to school (walking or cycling).

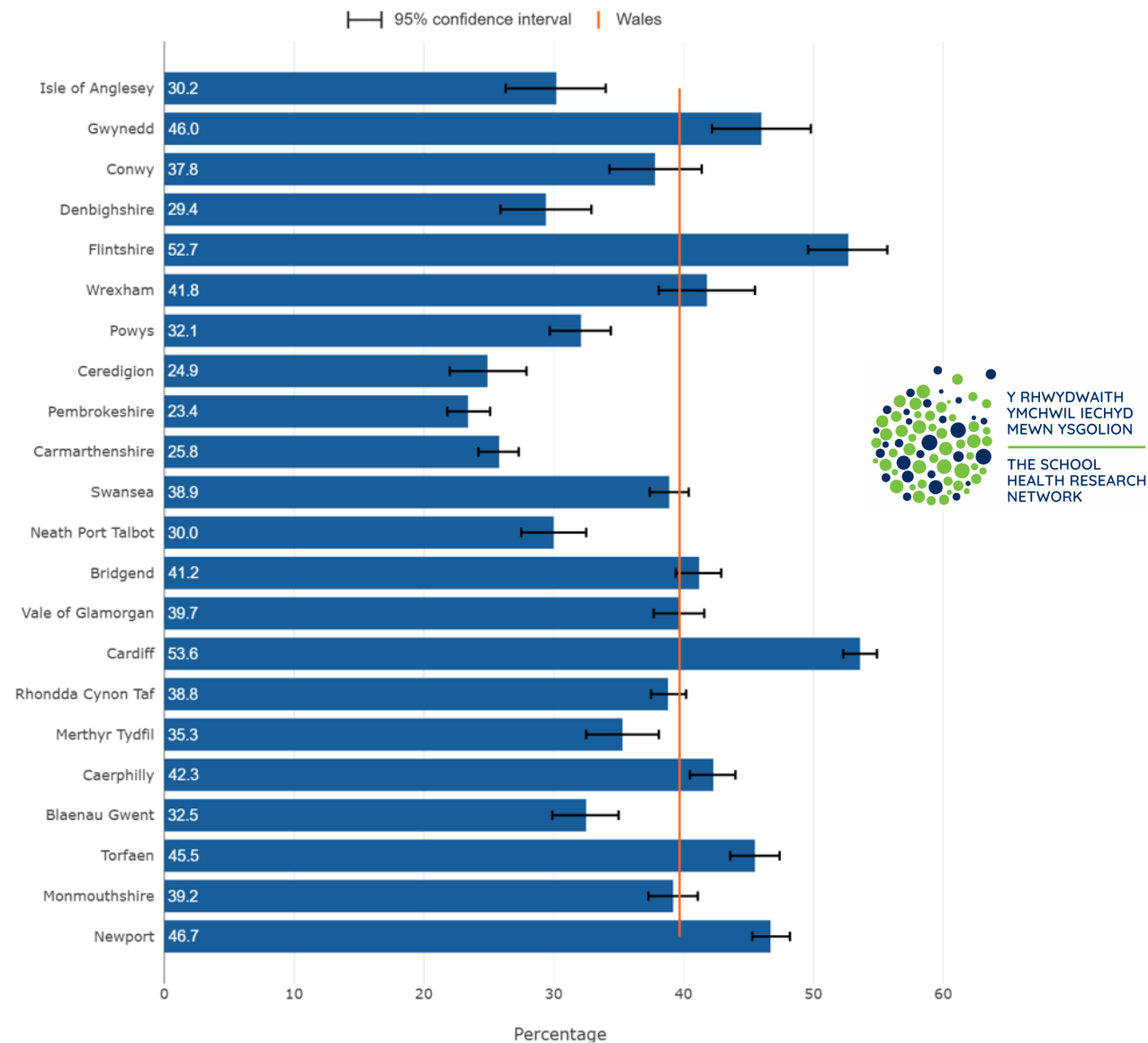
#### Data source:

The SHRN Student Health and Well-Being Survey in Secondary Schools 2023:

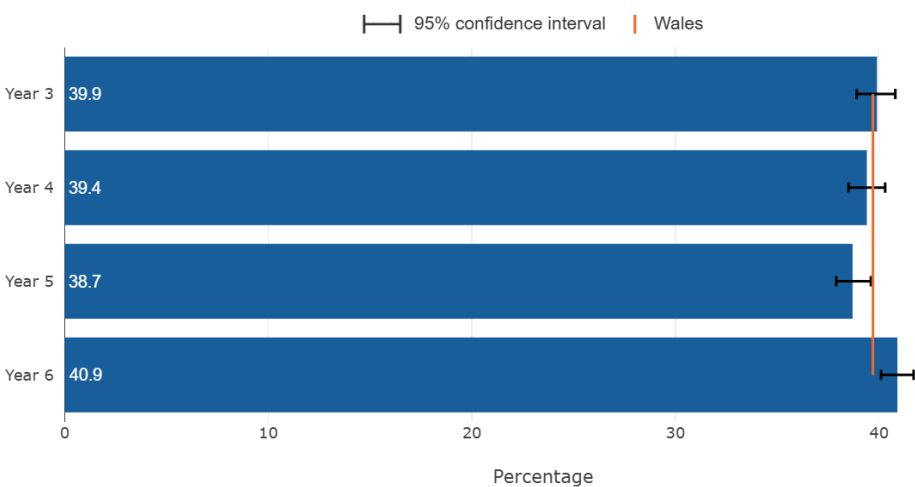
- 200 secondary schools took part, representing 95% of all state maintained secondary schools in Wales.
- 128,710 learners in years 7 to 11 completed the survey, representing 73% of all state maintained secondary school learners in Wales.



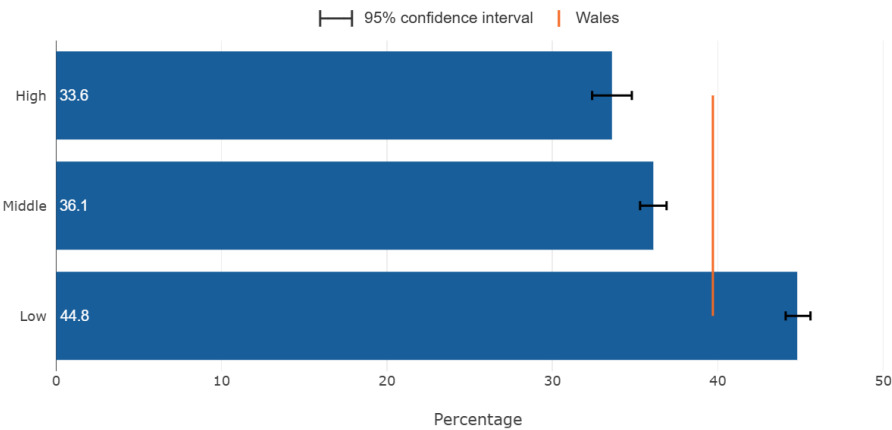
Primary school children who reported actively travelling to school, percentage, persons, local authorities, 2024



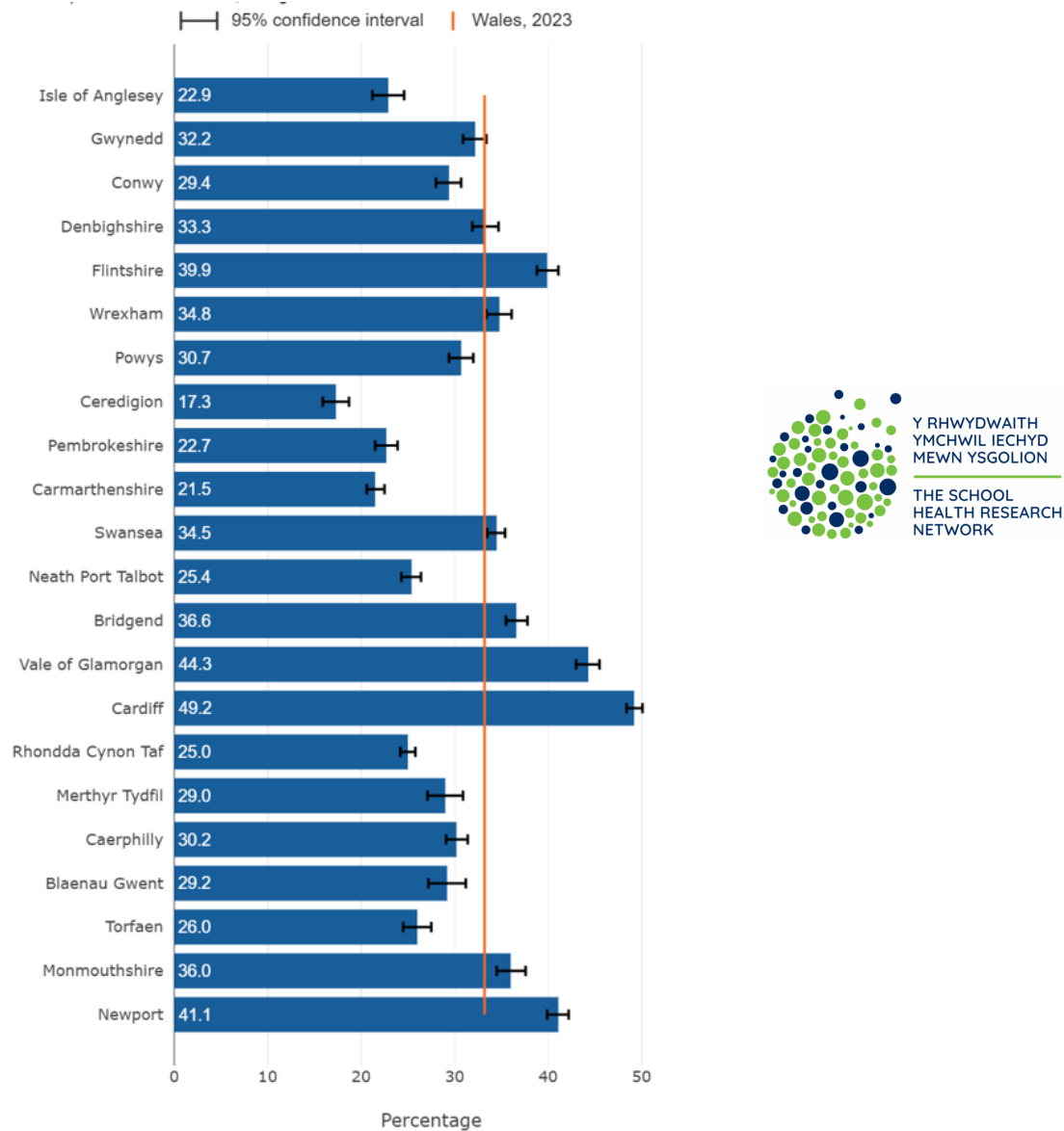
Primary school children who reported actively travelling to school, percentage, persons, year groups, 2024



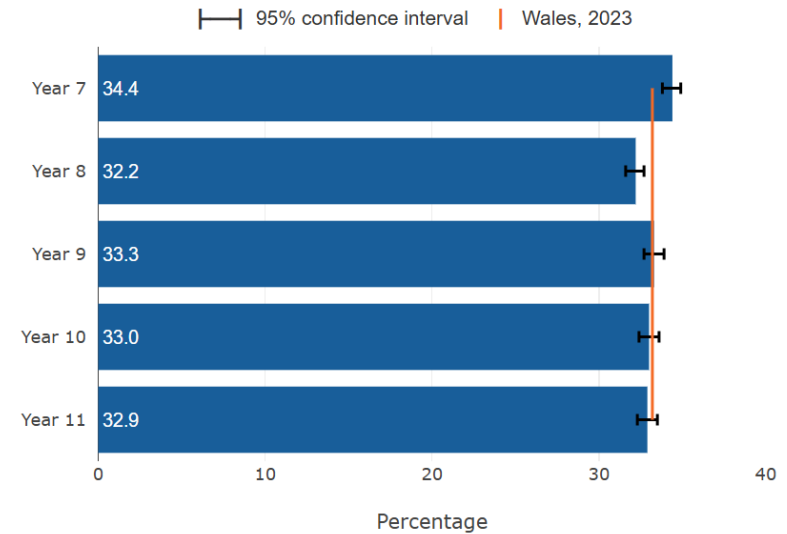
Primary school children who reported actively travelling to school, percentage, persons, high, middle and low Family Affluence Scale (FAS), 2024



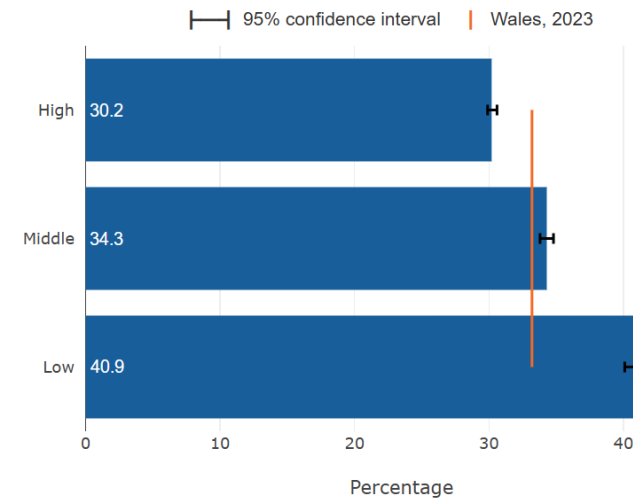
## Secondary school children who reported actively travelling to school (walking or cycling), percentage, persons, local authorities, 2023



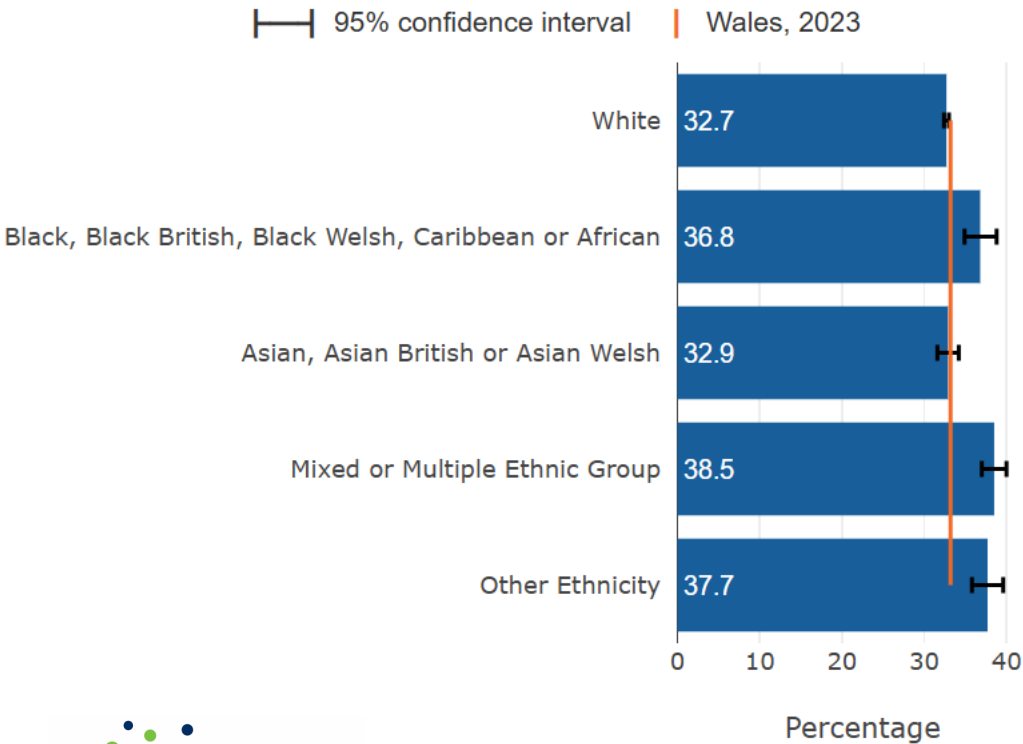
## Secondary school children who reported actively travelling to school (walking or cycling), percentage, persons, year groups, 2023



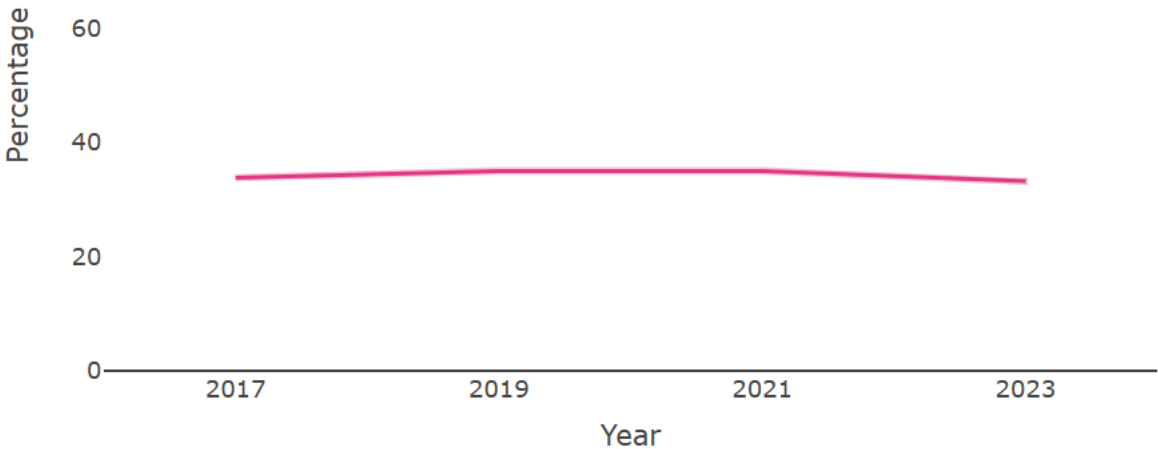
## Secondary school children who reported actively travelling to school (walking or cycling), percentage, persons, high, middle and low Family Affluence Scale (FAS), 2023



Secondary school children who reported actively travelling to school (walking or cycling), percentage, persons, Wales, multiple ethnic groups, 2023



Secondary school children who reported actively travelling to school (walking or cycling), percentage, persons, Wales, 2017 to 2023



| Breakdown | Gender  | Measure | 2017 | 2019 | 2021 | 2023 |
|-----------|---------|---------|------|------|------|------|
| Wales     | Persons | %       | 33.8 | 35.0 | 35.0 | 33.2 |
| Wales     | Persons | LCL     | 33.5 | 34.7 | 34.7 | 32.9 |
| Wales     | Persons | UCL     | 34.1 | 35.3 | 35.3 | 33.4 |



## Summary narrative.

### Primary schools.

There are just over 250,000 primary school learners in Wales<sup>16</sup>, with around 150,000 **not** actively travelling to school. Just a 10% increase would mean an additional 15,000 children across Wales benefitting from walking, cycling, scooting or wheeling to school.

### Local authority variance.

There is considerable variation across Wales by local authority area. Among primary school learners the highest proportion travelling actively to school are in Cardiff (53.6%) and the lowest being in Pembrokeshire (23.4%).

Learners in more rural and dispersed communities may need to travel longer distances to school. Learners who attend a faith school or who attend a Welsh Medium school are also more likely to travel longer distances.

### Sex and age variance.

According to the SHRN data, at a national level there are no statistically significant differences between boys and girls. For age, whilst the SHRN data indicates some statistically significant differences amongst age groups, the variance is less than 2 percentage points.

### Family affluence variance.

There is a statistically significant 10.8 percentage point difference between the low affluence families (45.6%) and high affluence families (34.8%). This variance reflects findings in the peer reviewed literature, which suggests the main reason is the lack of car ownership, which is positively associated with ATS.<sup>17</sup>

### Secondary schools.

There are just over 170,000 secondary school learners in Wales<sup>16</sup>, with around 100,000 **not** actively travelling to school. Just a 10% increase would mean an additional 10,000 children across Wales benefitting from walking, cycling, scooting or wheeling to school.

### Local authority variance.

There is considerable variation across Wales by local authority area. Among secondary school learners the highest proportion travelling actively to school are in Cardiff (49.2%) and the lowest being in Ceredigion (17.3%).

Learners in more rural and dispersed communities may need to travel longer distances to school. Learners who attend a faith school or who attend a Welsh Medium school are also more likely to travel longer distances.

### Sex and age variance.

According to the SHRN data, at a national level there is statistically significant difference of 4.5 percentage points between boys (35.4%) and girls (30.9%). For age, whilst the SHRN data indicates some statistically significant differences amongst age groups, the variance is less than 2 percentage points.

### Family affluence variance.

There is a statistically significant 10.7 percentage point difference between the low affluence families (40.9%) and high affluence families (30.2%). This variance reflects findings in the peer reviewed literature, which suggests the main reason is the lack of car ownership, which is positively associated with ATS.<sup>17</sup>

# Additional notes and links to data sets

## Comparisons with the National Survey for Wales.

The 2024-25 National Survey for Wales reported that just under 33% of secondary school learners walk to school. Whilst the measure did not include cycling and the two surveys are not directly comparable, the similarity in estimates possibly indicates good convergent validity.

The same 2024-25 National Survey for Wales reported for primary school learners that just over 48% walk to school. This 8-percentage point difference observed between the SHRN Student Health and Well-being Survey in Primary Schools and National Survey for Wales is likely a product of methodological differences between surveys, including sampling design, respondents (child self-report versus parent proxy report), question wording, age composition, data collection procedures, and weighting strategies.

## Data links:

- SHRN Primary and Secondary School Health and Well-being Dashboards: [https://publichealthwales.shinyapps.io/SHRN\\_Dashboard/](https://publichealthwales.shinyapps.io/SHRN_Dashboard/)
- National Survey for Wales results viewer: <https://www.gov.wales/national-survey-wales-results-viewer>
- Schools' census results: January 2025: <https://www.gov.wales/schools-census-results-january-2025-html>

For further information and PDF copies of the references please contact:

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