

Growing concern among families about dirty air

Author: Ben Webster - May 20 2019, The Times

Almost two thirds of parents are concerned about the impact air pollution is having on their children's health, a survey has found.

Awareness of the threat to children from poor air quality is rising, with the proportion of parents with children aged 4-11 saying it concerned them rising from 56 per cent in last year's survey to 65 per cent this year.

Across the country 40 per cent said they were concerned about the levels of air pollution around their child's school or on the school run. In London that figure rose to 68 per cent.

Living Streets, the walking charity which commissioned the surveys, said last year's had found that air pollution deterred one in ten parents from walking their children to school.

It said many parents did not realise that **children could be more exposed to air pollution while sitting in cars than walking beside roads**. Toxic emissions from surrounding vehicles can become trapped inside cars.

Jenni Wiggle, of Living Streets, said "This research shows that we're all becoming more aware of the dangers of air pollution on our health. What's concerning is that parents are put off doing the one thing which could drastically improve the air quality around their child's school.

"Walking to school is a positive action parents can take to help clean up our air. We know this isn't an easy option for all parents which is why we're launching our School Streets toolkit to help make the walk to school an easier choice for everyone."

Stephen Holgate, a consultant respiratory physician at the University of Southampton, said: **"Exposure to pollution can be far higher sitting in the back of a car or in a bus than outside.** Exercise and activity by children, as well as socialising among friends, is greatly improved by active travel."

Penny Woods, chief executive of the British Lung Foundation, said: "Walking and cycling to school is a key part of cleaning up the air around our homes and schools. Children are often exposed to the highest levels of pollution inside a car on their commute. If more people walked to school, it really would make a big difference."