Walk safely and improve well being

By Cameron Tait

WERRIBEE: Primary School pupils are gearing up to put their best foot forward on May 15.

They will be one of 8000 across Australia to take part in Walk Safely to School Day, designed to promote the benefits of regular physical activity on overall health and wellbeing of children and their families.

Now in its 10th year, the event urges parents and carers to walk to school with their children, either all or at least part of the way.

The aim is to encourage children to exercise regularly, including at least 30 minutes of walking in their daily routine, and reduce hazardous traffic congestion and vehicle pollution around schools.

Research by VicHealth revealed one-third of all primary school children in Melbourne walked less than five minutes a day.

Although 72 per cent are driven to school, 62 per cent said that if given the choice, they would prefer to walk.

Event organiser Harold Scruby, of the Pedestrian Council of Australia, said it was an opportunity to develop healthy and sustainable habits for life.

"Encouraging children to walk regularly, instead of jumping into the car, is an easy, effective and achievable way to forge their pathway to becoming healthy adults," he said.

"A walk in the morning also prepares students mentally for an active day of learning and playing.

"By leaving the car at least a kilometre from school, parents can avoid traffic congestion and stress of dropping the kids off, while enjoying a peaceful walk and talk."

While many parents are busy or simply can't walk all the way to school, Mr Scruby says they can still take part in the event.

"We understand walking the entire way to school can be difficult or impractical for some parents and carers," he said.

"If you have to drive, don't forget you can simply park the car a good distance away from the school and walk the rest of the way."

The event is supported by state and federal governments, the National Heart Foundation, the national depression initiative beyondblue, The Cancer Council Australia, Planet Ark, Diabetes Australia and Woolworths.

Beyondblue chief executive Leonie Young said it was proud to be associated with the cause. "We're pleased to support Walk Safely to School Day because exercising and looking after your physical health helps maintain good mental health.

"Walking to school is a great, safe way for families to spend time together while getting their daily exercise."

Ms Young said research had shown regular walking could lift your mood, aid uninterrupted sleep, increase energy, decrease fatigue and lead to an improved sense of wellbeing.

For details, visit www.walk.com.au