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## More Exercise Needed to Tackle Child Obesity, British Medical Association Scotland

To mark the beginning of International Walk to School month [1 - 31 October 2008], BMA Scotland has today (Wednesday 1 October) published a briefing paper highlighting the health and social benefits of encouraging children to have an active lifestyle.

Dr Dean Marshall, Chairman of the BMA's Scottish General Practitioners Committee, said:

"To maintain good health and stave off obesity and other serious illness in later life, it is recommended that children engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day, such as brisk walking, running, and sports. However, research suggests that currently only around half of seven to 11 year olds are achieving this. So it's essential to get kids moving. The journey to and from school is the perfect place to start.

"The number of children travelling to school by car has doubled over the last 20 years. Getting children into the habit of walking to school has obvious environmental benefits, and it helps with the fight against childhood obesity too."

The paper also highlights the inequalities between rich and poor which have a profound influence on the future health of children in Scotland. Deprivation limits access to safe play areas, safe physical activities and leads to a shortage of money to take part in physical activities.

Dr Marshall added:

"Everyone can increase their activity levels and therefore exercise is an effective way of addressing health inequalities. However, in deprived areas, many parents are scared to let their children go outside because the roads are so busy, and in many communities there are the additional dangers of unsafe environments, where play areas are littered with discarded syringes and broken glass."

To get Scotland moving, the Scottish Government should:

Develop an effective strategy to encourage teenagers and young adults to take part in regular exercise

- Encourage doctors to prescribe exercise for the overweight/obese (e.g. reduced cost/free access to local authority sports centres)
- Improve access to subsidised sporting facilities for both children and parents. Easy access for those from lower socio-economic groups is particularly important
- Take assertive action to improve communities and make them clean, safe and healthy for our children

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