



Key findings from The Walking In Schools (WISH) Study, a peer-led walking intervention for adolescent girls

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WORKSHOP 10:

Opportunities for Physical Activity through the School Day



Maria O'Kane



Key findings from The Walking In Schools (WISH) Study, a peer-led walking intervention for adolescent girls

Wednesday June 19th, 11.40am - 12.55pm

Project Description: The effects of walking interventions on adult health are known, however the potential of walking to promote physical activity (PA) in adolescents is less known. This study evaluated the effectiveness of a novel, school-based walking intervention at increasing PA levels of adolescent girls. Female pupils aged 12-14 years, were recruited from eighteen (mixed or single-sex) schools across the Border Region of Ireland/Northern Ireland. Schools were randomised to control (usual physical activity; n9) or intervention (n9). In intervention schools, female pupils (15-18 years) were trained as walk leaders and led the younger pupils in 10-15min walks before school, at break and lunchtime. Walks were in school grounds and pupils were encouraged to join as many walks as possible. Excluding holidays, the intervention was delivered for a full school year (18-21 weeks). Accelerometers measured PA and the primary outcome was total PA (cpm). **Impact:** In total, 589 pupils were recruited (intervention: n286; control n303). Baseline moderate-vigorous PA (MVPA) for the intervention group was (median [IQR]) 36.1 (23.0) mins per day and 35.3 (19.8) mins per day in the control group. At baseline, only 15% (n37) of intervention and 10% (n29) of control participants met PA guidelines (60 mins MVPA per day). **Post-intervention total PA (cpm)** did not statistically differ between groups when adjusted for age, body mass index z-scores and baseline PA (mean difference, -33.5, 95% CI= -21.2 to 88.1; p=0.213). **Learning:** 'Scaling-up' PA interventions is challenging. Despite a promising feasibility study, the results of this fully powered trial indicate that in this context, the walking programme did not increase PA. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, school environments have changed and although pupils enjoyed the programme, attendance at walks was low. There is a need to better understand the implementation of interventions such as WISH within schools.