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PRESS RELEASE

New NICE public health guidance on creating environments to encourage physical activity

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has today (23 January 2008) issued guidance on promoting and creating built or natural environments that encourage and support physical activity.

This guidance represents the first ever national, evidence-based recommendations on how to improve the physical environment to encourage physical activity to improve health. These recommendations are not only for the NHS and local authorities, but for all those who have a role or responsibility for a built or natural environment; including planners, transport authorities, building managers, designers and architects.

The guidance highlights that environmental factors need to be tackled in order to make it easier for people to be active in their daily lives. The recommendations, which are aimed at a variety of sectors and settings, include:

- Ensure planning applications for new developments always prioritise the need for people (including those whose mobility is impaired) to be physically active as routine part of their daily life.
- Ensure pedestrians, cyclists and users of other modes of transport that involve physical activity are given the highest priority when developing or maintaining streets and roads (this includes people whose mobility is impaired).
- Ensure new workplaces are linked to walking and cycling networks.
- During building design or refurbishment, ensure staircases are attractive to use and clearly signposted to encourage people to use them.

Increasing physical activity levels has numerous benefits. It can help to prevent or manage over 20 conditions and diseases, including coronary heart disease, diabetes, some cancers and obesity. Currently around 2 in 3 men and three-quarters of women in England do not achieve the recommended level of activity for health. Physical activity can help to improve mental health, and it can also help older people to maintain independent lives.

Dr Gillian Leng, Executive Lead for the guidance, and Deputy Chief Executive at NICE said: “We know physical activity is good for your health, but increasing levels of activity can be a challenge. But small changes to our environment such as making it easier to walk, cycle or take the stairs as part of everyday life can be enough to help people to meet the national recommended levels.

“Every day, planners, designers and architects make decisions that affect the way people live; what we are recommending is that they should do this in a way that makes it easier for people to be physically active.”

Professor Mike Kelly, Director, Centre for Public Health Excellence at NICE said: “Our lives are more sedentary than ever before, but even modest increases in daily activity, such as brisk walking, will help break the pattern of couch potato behaviour and benefit health. To help this happen, the environment in both urban and rural areas needs to provide safe places for people to walk or cycle, and to ensure that local amenities are accessible. Town planning and public health have been synonymous with each other since the 19th century cholera outbreaks, and this guidance reinforces the link between 21st century town planning and public health to improve physical activity.”

Tim Stonor, NICE guidance developer and Managing Director of Space Syntax said: “Architects and planners have a vital role to play in making our surroundings better places for us all to be active in. This guidance draws all the disciplines involved in planning and design together; placing people first; showing that the goal should be to create not only beautiful buildings and public places but also ones that will help people to be physically active too.”

Deirdra Armsby, NICE guidance developer and Forward Planning Manager at the London Borough of Newham said: “This guidance is about ensuring everyone has a choice to be active if they can be. For instance in getting to the local shops or schools people should be able to use routes that are safe and attractive – this includes parents with pushchairs, people using a wheelchair or with other mobility impairments. Everyone should have the opportunity to use forms of physically active

transport such as walking or cycling if they wish to - making daily activities healthier and more sociable.”

Philip Insall, NICE guidance developer and Director of Sustrans’ Active Travel Programme, said: “These are excellent recommendations from NICE, bridging the gap between the Government’s wish to promote physical activity for a healthy lifestyle and a transport and planning system which deters people from walking and cycling.

“Local authorities and professionals in transport, planning and development will recognise that what NICE recommends as health promoting will also help make cities more human and liveable. This guidance should be the final argument convincing the transport sector to make walking and cycling the first priority for all local trips.”

Ends

Notes to Editors

About the guidance

1. The physical activity and environment guidance is available at: www.nice.org.uk/PH008 (from 00.01hrs, Wednesday 23 January). The summarised recommendations are available from Alice Law on 020 7067 5905 or alice.law@nice.org.uk
2. Currently around 65% of men and 76% of women in England do not achieve the recommended level of activity for health (to accumulate at least 30 minutes of at least moderate intensity physical activity on five or more days of the week). Moderate physical activity is equivalent to brisk walking (approx 5kph).

About NICE

3. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is the independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention and treatment of ill health.
4. NICE produces guidance in three areas of health:
 - **public health** – guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention of ill health for those working in the NHS, local authorities and the wider public and voluntary sector
 - **health technologies** – guidance on the use of new and existing medicines, treatments and procedures within the NHS
 - **clinical practice** – guidance on the appropriate treatment and care of people with specific diseases and conditions within the NHS.