

Physical activity and the environment

Review Four:

POLICY

NICE guideline PH8 (published January 2008) has been updated and replaced by NG90.

New recommendations have been added on strategies, policies and plans to increase physical activity in the local environment (1.1.1 to 1.1.3); active travel (1.2.1 to 1.2.4 and 1.2.6 to 1.2.9); public open spaces (1.3.1 to 1.3.3). NICE has deleted some recommendations from the 2008 guideline because the evidence has been reviewed and the recommendations have been updated.

This evidence review is relevant to the updated guideline.

See the [guideline](#) for more details.

Executive Summary

This report investigates the extent to which public policies on the environment, operating at either national or local levels, can influence changes in physical activity (or an outcome associated with physical activity).

Studies were included if they assessed the impact of a stated policy (from any public body including the government, or a private body such as employers) on an aspect of the physical environment, and related this either to a direct measure of physical activity, or an outcome closely related to physical activity (such as footpath use).

Three studies were included. These were cross-sectional 'post only' design that described the implementation of a policy (or policies) and related this to levels of physical activity. They varied in scale from international comparisons through to national and regional level. They were all uncontrolled post-intervention only studies that described changes to policy on the built or natural environment, and related these to changes in physical activity or in factors related to physical activity.

The studies that were identified by the broad search strategy tended to fall into three different categories, depending on their focus and level of operation:

- National policy on health and physical activity (Vuori 2004)
- National transport policy (Pucher & Dijkstra 2000)
- National/ Regional planning policy (Schwanen et al 2004)

National policy on health and physical activity

The evidence from one (3-) study suggests there may be an association between national policies on physical activity which include a focus on improving the environment, and increased recreational physical activity and sport.

National transport policy

The evidence from one (3-) study suggests there may be an association between national transport related policies that include an environmental modification component and improved levels of walking and cycling compared to countries without such policies.

National/ Regional planning policy

The evidence from one (3-) study suggests there may be an association between national spatial planning policies and levels of walking and cycling, particularly in more urbanised areas.

Included studies

Pucher J, Dijkstra L. Public health matters. Promoting safe walking and cycling to improve public health: lessons from the Netherlands and Germany. *American Journal of Public Health* 2003 Sep; 93:1509-16.

Schwanen T, Dijst M, Dieleman F M. Policies for urban form and their impact on travel: The Netherlands experience
Urban Studies. Mar 2004 41(3) pp579-603

Vuori I, Lankenau B, Pratt M. Physical activity policy and program development: the experience in Finland. *Public Health Reports* 2004; 119:331-45.

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