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**Cycle and walking 'must be norm' for short journeys**

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**Cycling and walking should be the norm for all short journeys, experts say.**

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence said people should shun their cars if a trip could be done in 15 or 20 minutes on foot or bike.

It said the approach was needed to combat the "silent epidemic" of inactivity posing a risk to the health of people in England.

It said their new responsibility for public health, which the NHS will hand over next year under the government's reform programme, offered a "unique opportunity" to make a difference.

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) said councils should look to introduce bicycle-hire schemes, car-free events and better cycle-route signalling and maps.

Walking routes should also be better highlighted, with signposts indicating the distance and time it takes to walk to local destinations.

Schools and workplaces should also be encouraged to get more pupils and staff cycling and walking.

NICE has previously given its backing to 20mph speed limits in certain areas.

The group said local authorities needed to take action, as the levels of inactivity were costing lives.

A recent report in the Lancet said inactivity was now causing as many deaths as smoking.

Latest figures suggest six in 10 men and seven in 10 women are not doing the recommended levels of physical activity.

The figures are little better for children.

In particular, levels of cycling and walking are falling - with England lagging well behind other European countries, such as the Netherlands and Denmark. Only 11 minutes a day on average is spent cycling or walking.

"It's not necessarily about spending more money on transport, but investing existing money in our health by rethinking the way in which budgets are being spent."