

Media Release

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What the public thinks

Top ten **child health problems**

Excessive screen time has emerged as the top 'big problem' for the health of Australian children and teenagers according to new research released today.

The Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) [Australian Child Health Poll](#) reveals the top ten child health problems as reported by the Australian public.

The key findings show that:

- Almost 60% of Australians say excessive screen time is a big health problem for Australian children and young people.
- Parents rate obesity more highly as a big problem for children in the community than for their own children.
- One in ten parents rate dental issues as a big problem for their own children.
- The top ten perceived health problems relate to modern lifestyle, mental health concerns and child safety.

Dr Anthea Rhodes, Director of the Australian Child Health Poll, said the results show that excessive screen time was perceived as a big health problem across all sections of the community.

"Nearly 60% of parents identified excessive screen time as a big problem for children in the community and one in five rated it as a big problem in their own home.

"It's identified as a big problem by parents of very young children and the number of parents who see it as a big problem increases as their children grow up," Dr Rhodes said.

"More than one in ten parents of preschool age children and more than a quarter of parents of teenagers have told us that excessive screen time is a big health problem for their children.

"The challenge in this data for us as healthcare providers is: Excessive screen time is not a traditional health problem, as such, so how do we provide care to children and their families struggling with what they have told us is a significant issue?"

In other key findings, the poll has revealed major differences between what parents perceive as big problems for their own children, compared to all children.

While 48% of parents rated obesity as a big problem for all children, only 8% rated it as a big problem for their own children.

“The implications of this are significant when one in four Australian children are overweight,” Dr Rhodes said.

“If parents aren’t recognising obesity as a problem in their own homes it might prove difficult to address the causes of childhood obesity.”

In addition to excessive screen time and obesity, other health problems in the top ten included not enough physical activity, unhealthy diet, bullying, illegal drug use and internet safety.

Dr Rhodes said: “Modern day health problems are easier to ignore than address. Parents often don’t know where to turn for help and there’s no magic pill or bandage solution. It’s not clear who’s responsible for addressing these issues. Is it GPs, health practitioners, schools or parents themselves?

“These issues have become so engrained in our lives that they’re almost perceived as unsolvable problems. But we now know that the community considers them to be the biggest health problems for children and teenagers today.”

The new RCH Australian Child Health Poll will be conducted quarterly to deliver timely, relevant new knowledge about the health, wellbeing and lived experience of children and young people in contemporary Australia. Each poll will focus on a different topic or theme.

For more information and media resources, including audio and video, see www.childhealthpoll.org.au

Data Source

The RCH Australian Child Health Poll is a quarterly survey of a nationally representative sample of 2000 Australian households, with and without children. The survey is conducted by an independent research agency on behalf of The Royal Children’s Hospital, Melbourne. Each sample is subsequently weighted to reflect the latest Australian population figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics census data.

Top ten Child Health Problems

1. Excessive screen time
2. Obesity
3. Not enough physical activity
4. Unhealthy diet
5. Bullying
6. Illegal drug use
7. Family and domestic violence
8. Internet safety
9. Child abuse and neglect
10. Suicide

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