

Media release

Getting children to school is no easy ride for parents

Most Australian school children are being driven to school, latest RCH poll shows

Seven out of ten Australian school children almost never walk or ride to school, according to new research by The Royal Children's Hospital.

And more than half of school children are driven to school every day as time-poor parents juggle work pressures and family schedules, the RCH National Child Health Poll shows.

The poll also shows many parents know walking, riding or taking public transport to school is healthy but concerns about strangers, bullies and traffic hazards stop them from letting their children travel without an adult.

The poll of 1745 parents nationwide caring for 2849 children aged from five to 18 years found:

- The majority of children (58%) are driven to or from school by car most days of the week
- 71% of children do not walk or ride to school at all in a typical week
- More than half (52%) of primary school children live less than 2km from school, while a quarter (26%) live less than 1km
- One in five teenagers (21%) never travel to or from school without an adult
- Children are on average 11 years old when they first travel to school without an adult, with 45% teenagers travelling every day independently
- One in five (18%) parents have used a geolocation device to monitor the location of their child, saying tracking their child's location made them feel more comfortable to let them travel without an adult

Parents who drove their children to school said it was the quickest form of transport (52%) or the safest (48%). Almost half drove to school because it fits the family's schedule (46%) and was a way to spend time with their child (19%). One in six parents said they drove because it was their child's preference (15%).

Parents also identified other barriers that stopped children walking or riding to school. Most parents (58%) said school was too far away to walk or ride, while one in four parents (42%) said their child had too much to carry and 46% said there was nowhere safe for their child travelling alone to cross the road.

Despite the reliance on driving, the poll also shows many children are bucking the trend by stepping out of the car and walking, riding their bike or taking public transport to school, either with or without an adult.

One in four primary-school children (24%) walk or ride to school most days of the week, either with or without an adult, while about a third of teenagers (38%) take public transport most days of the week.

RCH National Child Health Poll Director Dr Anthea Rhodes said primary-school-aged children needed 60 minutes of physical activity a day and walking or riding to school was a great way to provide it.

“For many children, the trip to school is short, and yet most get there by car,” Dr Rhodes said.

Media release

“Work and life pressures make it hard for parents to walk or ride with their children to school, but even one day a week of active travel to school is better than nothing at all,” she said.

“Walking or riding to school is a healthy habit – even if you drive part of the way and walk the rest. It lets children practice road safety and it gives you time to connect with your child.

“If children walk, ride or take public transport to school once a week, they will learn about road safety, as well as independence and problem solving skills. It sets up them well to start to travel by themselves when they are ready.”