



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### AUSSIE PRIMARY KIDS BUBBLE WRAPPED TIGHTER THAN U.K. CHILDREN

Australian parents of 10 to 12-year-olds are more hesitant to allow their kids to walk home from school alone than their British counterparts, according to new research released today by Deakin University and VicHealth.

And more than half of Aussie primary school kids (51%) are ferried to school by car, compared with less than a third (32%) of primary school children in England, despite generally walkable distances to and from school.

The research, led by Doctor Alison Carver, compared 784 primary school children and 455 secondary school children in rural and metro areas of Britain and Victoria.

It coincides with the VicHealth's Walk to School month ([www.walktoschool.vic.gov.au](http://www.walktoschool.vic.gov.au)), when thousands of children across the state will buck the trends by setting off to school on foot every school day in November.

Four in five (78%) 11-year-old British kids were allowed to walk home from school alone, compared with less than half of Australian children of the same age (43%). And most UK children of that age were allowed to cross the road alone, compared to only two-thirds of Australian kids (85% vs 64%).

The researchers looked at parents granting 'licenses' – or permission – for crossing roads alone, travelling to places other to school alone, going home from school, going out after dark alone, travelling on buses and cycling solo.

Dr Alison Carver said children's independence often increases when they reach secondary school.

"Most Australian 11 and 12-year-olds are still at primary school and face greater parental restrictions than those in England, who start school at an earlier age and are already attending secondary school," Dr Carver said.

"Park and Walk facilities located 500 to 800 metres from schools may encourage children to walk at least part of the way and help ease congestion around school gates."

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter said the research confirms that children's walking is declining, at a time when childhood obesity has reached record levels.

"VicHealth is interested in the reasons why so many kids are still getting dropped off at school when the walk is usually manageable and obviously beneficial for their health and development," she said.

"There seems to be a symbolic granting of freedom when a child transitions to high school, regardless of the child's age. So while many kids are capable of independence when they are 10 to 12-years-old, they're generally not given permission to travel alone until they're in secondary school.

"Parents tell us that time constraints, concern about traffic, road safety, stranger danger and their child's road sense all get in the way of kids walking to and from school. But once parents make the decision to let their kids walk, they tend to realise that these fears are unwarranted and walking can be a wonderful activity for children's confidence and their health."

"Walk to School is about creating that awareness of the need for children to make walking part of their daily routine to improve fitness, friendships, the environment and their confidence."

The Australian schools were located in Fitzroy, Collingwood, Clifton Hill, Month Albert North, Surrey Hills, Knoxfield, Ferntree Gully, Gisborne, Korumburra and Kyneton.

The paper will be published in the hard copy edition of *Children's Geographies* this month.

Parents are encouraged to register their kids for Walk to School, and download the free interactive Walk to School game from the App Store. [Registering](#) for Walk to School is free and open to primary school students in Victoria. To learn more visit: [www.walktoschool.vic.gov.au](http://www.walktoschool.vic.gov.au)

### Level of independence granted to Australian vs. British children aged 8-15

Table 3. Mobility licences granted by parents according to age of child.

	8 years		9 years		10 years		11 years		12 years		13 years		14 years		15 years	
	Eng <i>n</i> = 89 (%)	Aus <i>n</i> = 22 (%)	Eng <i>n</i> = 94 (%)	Aus <i>n</i> = 22 (%)	Eng <i>n</i> = 77 (%)	Aus <i>n</i> = 109 (%)	Eng <i>n</i> = 78 (%)	Aus <i>n</i> = 113 (%)	Eng <i>n</i> = 77 (%)	Aus <i>n</i> = 105 (%)	Eng <i>n</i> = 39 (%)	Aus <i>n</i> = 100 (%)	Eng <i>n</i> = 29 (%)	Aus <i>n</i> = 85 (%)	Eng <i>n</i> = 8 (%)	Aus <i>n</i> = 37 (%)
Cross main roads alone	15	4	33	31	57	52	85	64	96	88	97	98	100	98	100	95
Go on their own to places other than school	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>	3	4	12	7	27	14	40	36	38	33	59	43	50	41
Come home from school alone	7	14	20	23	54	34	78	43	83	71	87	83	<b>100</b>	<b>74</b>	62	86
Go out alone after dark	1	0	2	2	4	0	12	2	21	7	20	6	38	7	38	30
Travel on local buses alone	1	0	1	4	8	6	33	5	48	38	69	53	79	68	88	71
Cycle on main roads alone <sup>a</sup>	6	15	9	4	16	15	25	15	45	44	51	56	81	75	75	71

Notes: Eng, England; Aus, Australia. Bold values indicate significant differences at  $p < .05$  between countries (chi-square test of significance).

<sup>a</sup>For this item only, those who owned a bicycle were included.

Notes to editors: The article can be requested in hard copy from Jane Gardner at VicHealth, email [jgardner@vichealth.vic.gov.au](mailto:jgardner@vichealth.vic.gov.au)