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SURVEY SHOWS PARENTAL FEAR HINDERS KIDS' PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- * *City parents more likely to fear traffic accidents and child abduction than rural parents.*
- * *Families encouraged to participate in Walktober Walk-to-School Day Wednesday 20 Oct.*

A VicHealth survey of 1500 Victorian residents has revealed their perceptions of stranger danger, traffic concerns and neighbourhood crime are the most common barriers to allowing children to walk to school.

The survey results were released today in the lead up to *Walktober Walk-to-School Day* – Wednesday 20 October. The random phone survey showed 63 per cent of Victorians believe parents should not let primary school aged children move around their neighbourhoods unsupervised (such as walking to school, parks, sporting venues or the shops).

Country residents said children should not walk unaccompanied to school until the age of 11 and Melbournites said 11-and-a-half.

- 48 per cent of parents with children aged five to 11-years-old believe there is a high risk a child will be abducted by a stranger if allowed to walk around their neighbourhood alone.
- 43 per cent of parents with children under 18 agreed with the above.
- Yet, this is contradicted by 64% who agreed their neighbours would look after the welfare of an unsupervised child (Melbourne = 60%, other Victoria = 76%).
- 62 per cent of parents believe there is too much traffic on the roads (more Melbourne parents agreed).
- 66 per cent of parents say there are not enough bike paths for children to cycle safely to school without adult supervision.
- 35 per cent of all participants said the streets were not safe because there is a lot of crime (Melbourne = 37%, other Victoria = 31%).
- 34 per cent of all participants say footpaths are too narrow and pose a safety risk.

Last year 71,678 Victorian primary school children took part in *Walktober Walk-to-School Day*. Schools involved in previous Walktober events report that 90 per cent of city kids and 65 per cent of country kids live within three kilometres of school, yet only one in five students regularly walk to school.

VicHealth CEO Todd Harper said: "Most adults have childhood memories of coming home when it started getting dark or when you were hungry, but the world our kids live in is much more complex.

"The real risk of child abduction is extremely low, yet many parents believe there is a high risk. We can't allow this mistaken belief to stop our kids getting the exercise they need.

"Many parents want to provide more opportunities for children to participate in unsupervised activity, but are concerned this will reflect on them as bad parents. The fact is that good parenting is about nurturing the physical and mental health of children, which involves keeping them active, challenged and learning coping and social skills that will set them up for life.

"Walking also helps to reduce body fat, improve fitness and reduces the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers," Mr Harper added.

For more information on Walktober Walk-to-School Day, funded by VicHealth, visit www.walktober.com.au

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Notes to editors: The VicHealth phone survey was conducted between October and November 2009 and included parents, guardians and residents without children. Equal numbers of men and women took part and 73% city residents and 27% country residents - 19% were LOTE speakers. The results were weighted to provide a representative sample.

The research builds on a recent Nothing But Fear Itself literature review conducted for VicHealth by Prof Steve Zubrick, Asst/Prof Lisa Wood and Prof Billie Giles-Corti, available at <http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/en/Publications/Physical-Activity/Active-transport/Nothing-But-Fear-Itself.aspx>