Active transport to and from school

HIGHLIGHTS:

- **Active modes of transport to school are used much less now than in 1989/90. The percentage of 5–12-year-olds who walked to school dropped from 42% in 1989/90, to 29% in 2010–14, while cycling dropped from 12% in 1989/90 to 2% in 2010–14.**
- **In 2015/16, 46% of children aged 5–14 years usually used active transport (such as walking or cycling) to and from school. These were similar levels to 2006/07 (46%).**
- **Boys were more likely than girls to use physically active transport to and from school (49% vs 43%). Older children (10–14 years) were more likely to use active transport than younger children (5–9 years) (50% vs 42%). There were no differences by ethnic group or socioeconomic deprivation.**
- **Children living in Capital and Coast District Health Board (DHB) had the highest rate of using active transport to and from school (53%). Children living in Northland (27%) and Wairarapa (30%) DHBs had lower rates than the national rate.**

Relevance of active transport to health

Active forms of transport, such as walking and cycling, have a range of benefits, including producing no air pollution, noise pollution or greenhouse gases. The health benefits of active transport also include increased physical activity (with subsequent benefits for obesity and reduced risk of a range of diseases), and improved mental health (British Medical Association 2012). For children, using active transport (such as walking, cycling or scooters) to and from school is an important way for them to get some physical activity each day. With the high child obesity rate in New Zealand, this is a relatively easy way to increase physical activity in children.

Data for this factsheet

This factsheet includes two sources of data on active transport to school. Data are firstly presented on specific transport modes used by 5–12-year-olds to get to school, from the New Zealand Household Travel Survey. Data are then presented on active transport (walking, cycling and other non-motorised modes) for children aged 5–14 years, from the New Zealand Health Survey.

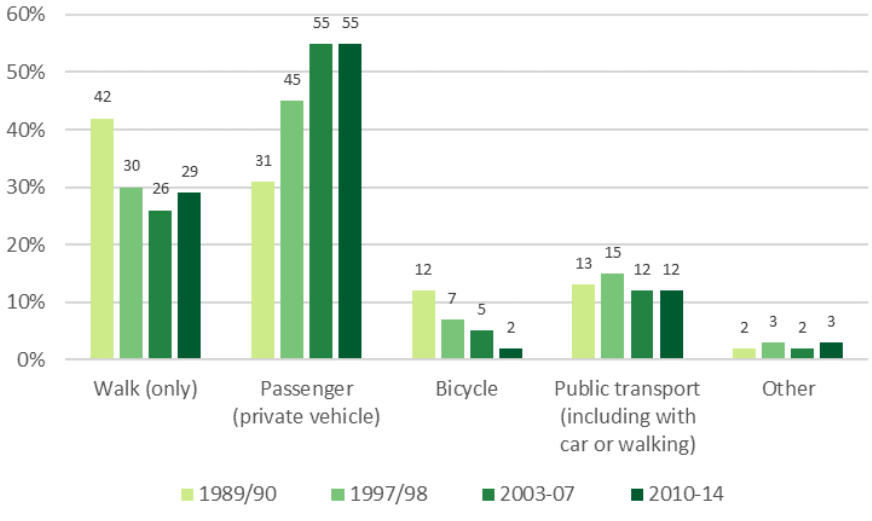
Dramatic change in transport mode since 1989/90

Children are much less likely to use active modes of transport to get to school now than during the late 1980s, according to the New Zealand Household Travel Survey.

The percentage of children walking to school dropped from 42% in 1989/90, to 29% in 2010–14 (Figure 1). For cycling, the percentage dropped from 12% in 1989/90, to 2% in 2010–14.

The percentage of children who were passengers in cars increased from 31% in 1989/90, to 55% in 2010–14.

Figure 1: Mode of transport used to get to school, children aged 5–12 years, 1989/90 – 2010–14 (unadjusted prevalence)



Source: New Zealand Household Travel Survey, Ministry of Transport (2014)

Active transport to and from school

Almost half of 5–14-year-olds used active transport to and from school

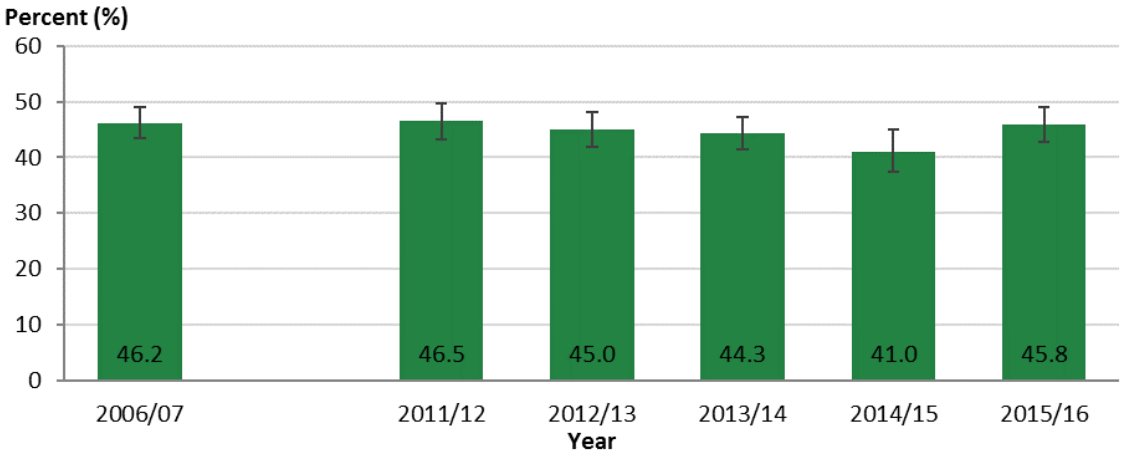
The following data are about children aged 5–14 years using active transport to and from school, from the New Zealand Health Survey. *Active transport* is defined for children as usually using a physically active form of transport (such as walking, cycling or other non-motorised modes such as skates) to get to and from school (Ministry of Health 2014).

In 2015/16, 45.8% of children aged 5–14 years usually used a physically active form of transport to get to and from school (95% confidence interval 42.7–49.0). This is about 280,000 children who usually used active transport to get to and from school in 2015/16 (Table 1).

No major change in the use of active transport since 2006/07

There has been no significant change in the use of active transport among 5–14-year-olds from 2006/07 (46.2%, 43.4–49.0) to 2015/16 (45.8%, 42.7–49.0) (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Usually used physically active form of transport to get to and from school, children aged 5–14 years, 2006/07–2015/16 (unadjusted prevalence)



Source: Ministry of Health (2016)

Boys and older children were more likely to usually use active transport to school

In 2015/16, boys had higher rates of using active transport to school than girls, with the following percentages usually using active transport to and from school:

- 48.5% (45.0–52.0) of boys
- 43.0% (38.6–47.6) of girls.

Adjusting for age differences, boys were 13% more likely than girls to use active transport (adjusted rate ratio 1.13, 1.01–1.26).

Older children were more likely to usually use active transport to and from school than younger children, with the following percentages usually using active transport:

- 49.7% (45.2–54.3) of children aged 10–14 years
- 42.3% (38.9–45.7) of children aged 5–9 years.

Active transport to and from school

Use of active transport is relatively consistent across ethnic groups and neighbourhood deprivation

There were no significant differences by ethnic group or neighbourhood deprivation in the use of active transport to get to and from school, in 2015/16 (Table 1, Figure 3, and Table 2).

Table 1 : Uses physically active form of transport to get to and from school, children aged 5–14 years, by total response ethnic group and neighbourhood deprivation (NZDep2013 quintiles), 2015/16 (unadjusted prevalence and estimated number)

Population group	Usually uses active transport to get to and from school (%, 95% CI)	Estimated number of children
Total	45.8 (42.7–49.0)	280,000
Māori	45.0 (41.0–49.1)	69,000
Pacific	48.3 (42.7–54.0)	39,000
Asian	45.1 (37.6–52.9)	34,000
European/Other	44.6 (40.9–48.3)	196,000
NZDep2013 quintile 1 (least deprived)	49.9 (41.7–58.2)	67,000
Quintile 2	41.9 (34.6–49.6)	48,000
Quintile 3	41.5 (35.3–48.0)	45,000
Quintile 4	47.0 (41.6–52.5)	53,000
Quintile 5 (most deprived)	47.5 (42.4–52.6)	66,000

Notes: 95% confidence intervals are given in brackets. Estimated numbers will add to more than the total for ethnic groups , due to total response ethnicity being used (where everyone is included in every ethnic group they report).
Source: Ministry of Health (2016)

Figure 3 : Uses physically active form of transport to get to and from school, children aged 5–14 years, by neighbourhood deprivation (NZDep2013 quintiles), 2015/16 (unadjusted prevalence)

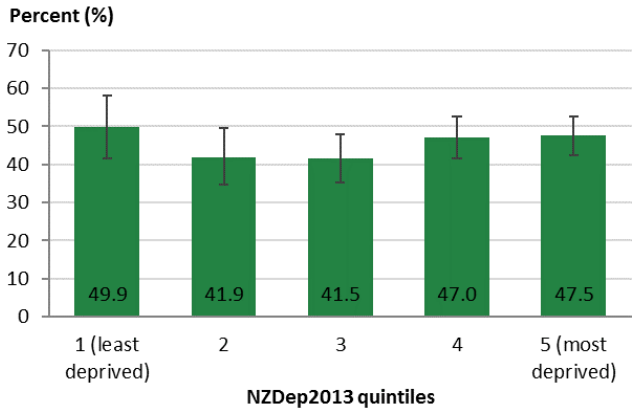


Table 2 : Comparison of population groups for use of physically active form of transport to get to and from school, children aged 5–14 years, by total response ethnic group and neighbourhood deprivation (NZDep2013), 2015/16 (adjusted rate ratios)

Comparison groups	Adjusted rate ratio	Adjustment variables
Māori vs non-Māori	0.98 (0.86–1.11)	Age, sex
Pacific vs non-Pacific	1.05 (0.92–1.19)	Age, sex
Asian vs non-Asian	1.00 (0.84–1.19)	Age, sex
High deprivation vs low deprivation	1.03 (0.80–1.32)	Age, sex, ethnic group

Notes: 95% confidence intervals are given in brackets. An asterisk (*) indicates a statistically significant result.
Source: Ministry of Health (2016)

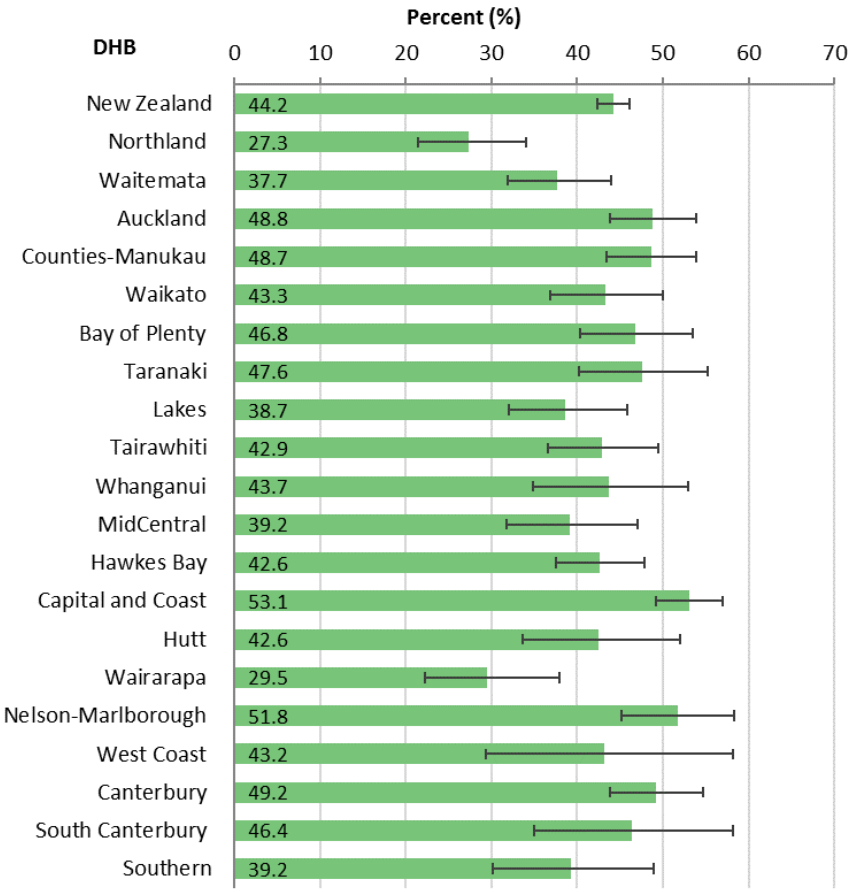
Active transport to and from school

Lower use of active transport for children living in Northland and Wairarapa DHBs

In 2011–15, the use of physically active transport to and from school varied by district health board (DHB) (Figure 4).

Children living in Capital and Coast DHB had the highest use of active transport to and from school (53.1%). Children living in Northland DHB (27.3%) and Wairarapa DHB (29.5%) had a lower use of active transport than the national rate.

Figure 4 : Usually uses physically active form of transport to get to and from school, children aged 5–14 years, by district health board (DHB), 2011–15 (unadjusted prevalence)



Notes: 95% confidence intervals are given in brackets.
Source: Ministry of Health (2016)

DATA SOURCES

Data come from the 2015/16 New Zealand Health Survey data tables (Ministry of Health 2016). Regional data for 2011–15 was requested separately from the Ministry of Health. For more information about this indicator, see the metadata sheet. Additional data come from the indicator '*TP007 Mode share of journeys to school*', using data from the New Zealand Household Travel Survey for 2010–14. More information is available on the Ministry of Transport website.

RELATED INDICATORS

Related environmental health indicators for transport, available from the EHINZ website (www.ehinz.ac.nz), include:

- Number of motor vehicles
- Main mode of transport to work on Census day
- Household travel time by mode of transport
- Unmet need for GP services due to lack of transport
- Transport injury hospitalisations and deaths
- About transport and health (information factsheet).

For more information, please contact Kylie Mason on ehnz@massey.ac.nz

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Ministry of Transport. (2014). *Travel patterns: Household travel (TP007 Mode share of journeys to school).* URL: http://www.transport.govt.nz/ourwork/tmif/travelpatterns/tp007/ (accessed 1 March 2017).