Active transport to and from school

This report presents an analysis of information from the latest New Zealand Health Survey on the estimated number of school-aged children (5–14 years) who usually used active transport (such as walking or cycling) to travel to and from school in 2024/25.

Key facts

- In 2024/25, 38.6% of children aged 5–14 years used active transport to travel to or from school.
- The percentage of children using active transport to school has been below 40% for each of the past 3 years.
- In general, older children (aged 10–14 years) were more likely to participate in active transport than younger children (5–9 years).
- In 2024/25, there were no significant differences in the use of active transport between ethnic groups, socioeconomic deprivation groups, or by health region.

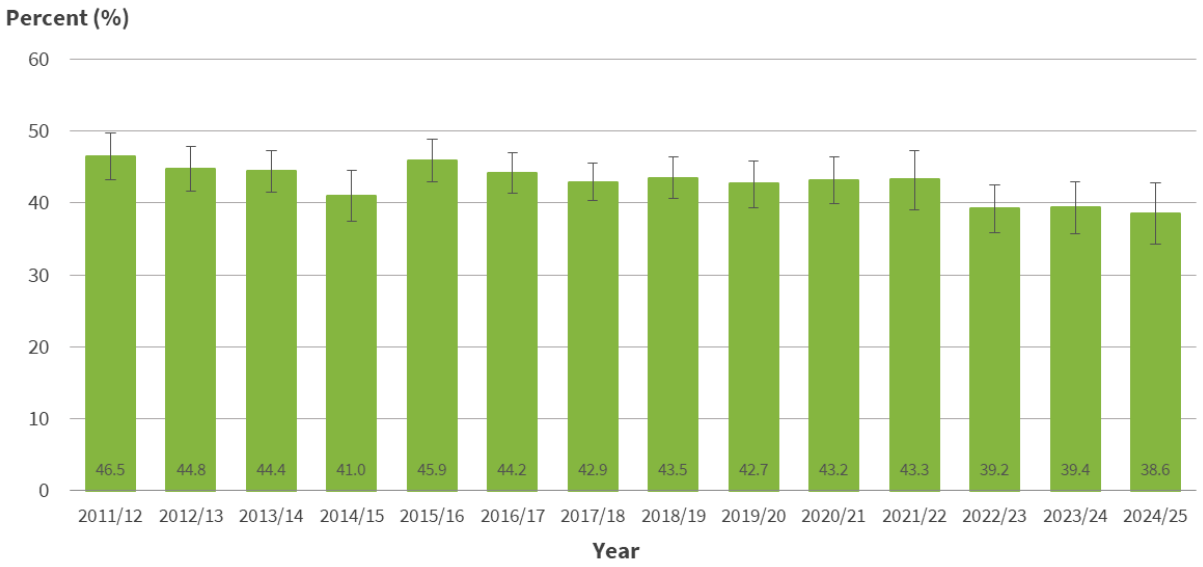
Using active transport to school is good for children's health

Using active transport to and from school is an effective way for children to get some physical activity each day. Sport New Zealand (2025) estimates that in 2024/25, only 59% of New Zealand children aged 5–11 years met the physical activity guidelines for the amount of daily physical activity. Considering the high child obesity rate in New Zealand, this is a relatively easy way to increase physical activity in children. The latest results from the New Zealand Health Survey indicate that around one in nine children (11.7%) were obese in 2024/25 (Ministry of Health 2025). Active transport also has other benefits, including producing less (or no) air pollution, noise pollution or greenhouse gases.

Less than 40% of 5–14-year-olds used active transport to or from school in 2024/25

Between July 2024 and June 2025 (2024/25), 38.6% of children aged 5–14 years usually travelled to and from school using a physically active form of transport, equivalent to around 261,000 children. This result is very similar to the previous two years (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Percent of children who usually used physically active transport to and from school, children aged 5–14 years, 2011/12–2024/25

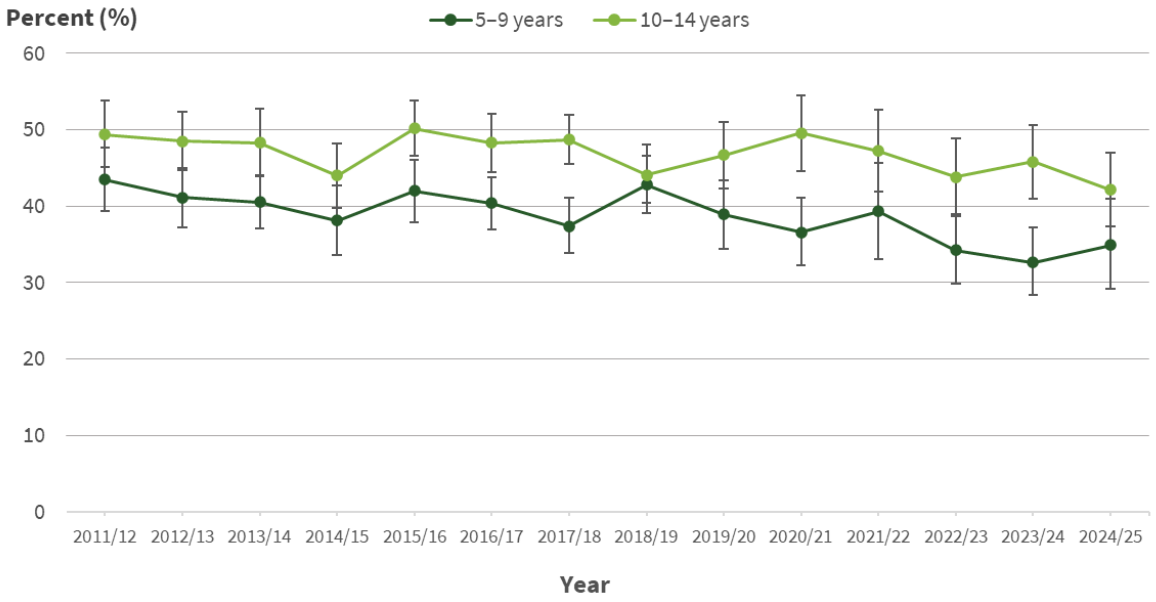


Notes: 95% confidence intervals (95%CIs) have been presented as vertical bars.
Source: New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health 2025)

Use of active transport is more common in older children

In 2024/25, 34.9% (95%CI 29.2–40.9) of children aged 5–9 years and 42.1% (95%CI 37.3–47.0) of children aged 10–14 years usually travelled to and from school using active transport (Figure 2). The difference in use of active transport between older and younger children was lower than in 2023/24, but has fluctuated over time.

Figure 2: Percent of children who usually used physically active transport to and from school, by age group, 2011/12–2024/25



Note: 95% confidence intervals have been presented as vertical bars.
Source: New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health 2025)

Use of active transport is similar between boys and girls

There was no statistically significant difference in the use of active transport between boys and girls aged 5–14, either at the total level or in any age group, in 2024/25 (Table 1).

Table 1: Percent of children who usually used active transport to and from school, by age group and sex, 2024/25

Age group (years)	Unadjusted prevalence (95%CI)	
	Boys	Girls
5–9	34.6 (27.8–41.9)	35.2 (28.0–42.9)
10–14	41.8 (35.4–48.4)	42.5 (36.7–48.4)
Total	38.3 (33.2–43.7)	38.9 (34.1–44.0)

Source: New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health 2025)

Active transport use was similar across most ethnic and deprivation groups

After adjusting for differences in age and sex, there were no statistically significant differences for Māori, Pacific or Asian children versus their comparison groups (Table 2).

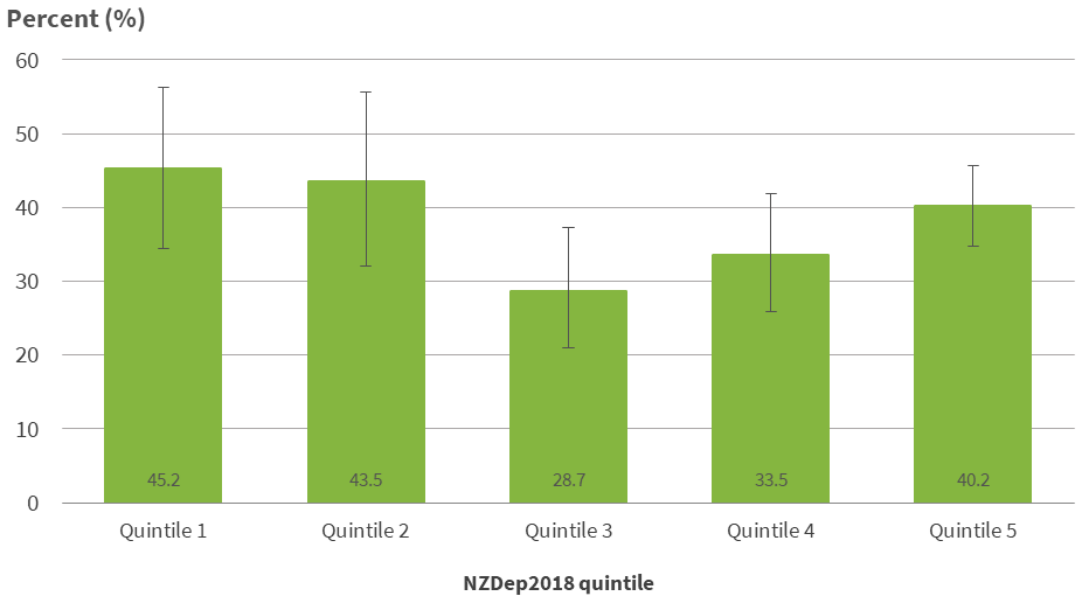
Table 2: Percent of children who usually used active transport to and from school, by ethnic group (total response), 2024/25

Age group (years)	Unadjusted prevalence (%, 95%CI)	Estimated number of children	Comparison groups	Adjusted rate ratio (RR, 95%CI)
Māori	39.9 (34.3–45.7)	72,000	vs. non-Māori	1.05 (0.88–1.25)
Pacific	34.8 (27.2–43.0)	28,000	vs. non-Pacific	0.89 (0.70–1.15)
Asian	39.3 (30.7–48.4)	60,000	vs. non-Asian	1.03 (0.84–1.26)
European/Other	38.9 (34.2–43.6)	178,000		
Total	38.6 (34.4–42.9)	261,000		

Note: Total response ethnic groups have been used, where respondents are counted in every ethnic group they report. This means that estimated numbers will add to more than the total.
Source: New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health 2025)

There was no consistent pattern in active transport use by deprivation quintile in 2024/25 (Figure 3). After adjusting for age, sex and ethnicity, there was no significant difference in the use of active transport between the most and least socio-economically deprived areas (adjusted rate ratio 0.78, 95%CI 0.54–1.13).

Figure 3: Percent of children who usually used active transport to travel to and from school, by socioeconomic deprivation (NZDep2018 quintile), 2024/25

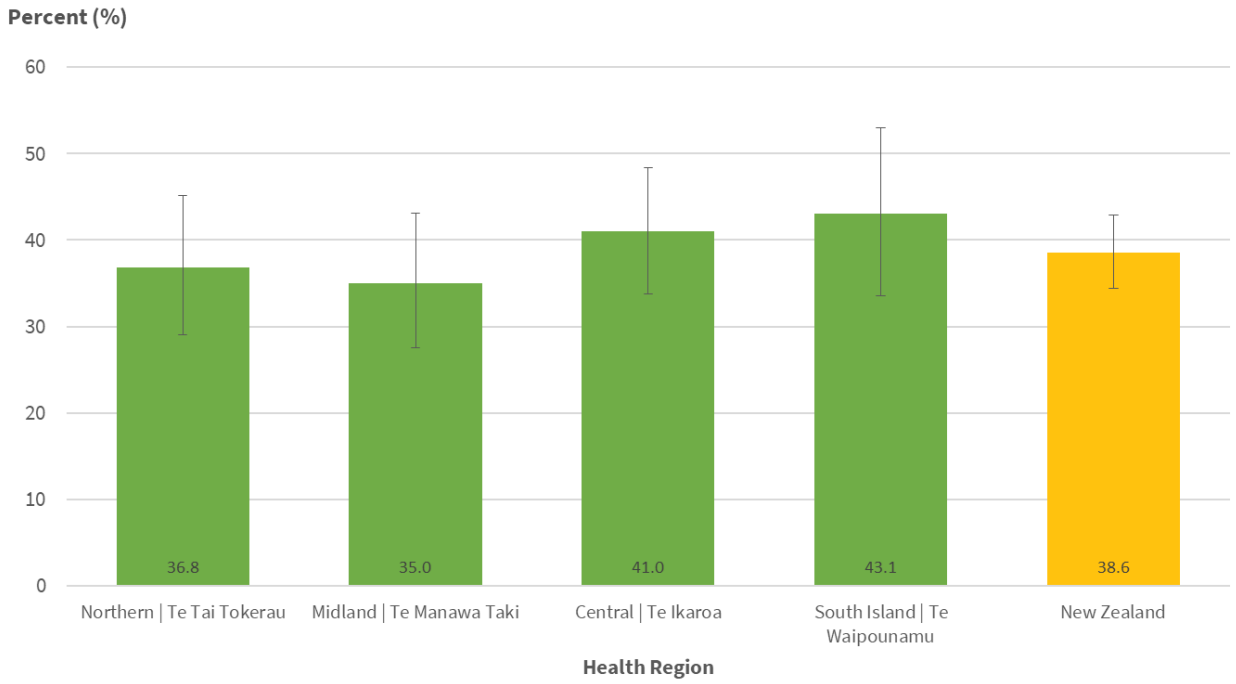


Notes: 95% confidence intervals have been presented as vertical bars.
Source: New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health 2025)

Active transport use was similar across health regions

The latest NZHS results include estimates by health region rather than districts (formerly District Health Boards). A map showing the areas covered by each health region is available on the Health NZ–Te Whatu Ora website. Regular use of active transport in 2024/25 was similar across health regions (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Percent of children who usually used active transport to travel to and from school, by health region, 2024/25



Notes: 95% confidence intervals have been presented as vertical bars. The four health regions (and the districts they cover) are: Te Waipounamu (Canterbury, West Coast, Nelson Marlborough, Southern and South Canterbury), Central (MidCentral, Whanganui, Capital & Coast/Hutt Valley, Hawkes Bay and Wairarapa), Te Manawa Taki (Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Lakes, Tairāwhiti and Taranaki), and Northern (Northland, Waitematā, Auckland and Counties Manukau).
Source: New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health 2025)

Data for this indicator

This indicator presents an analysis of the most recent results available from the 2024/25 New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health 2025). Data collection took place between July 2024 and June 2025. All 95% confidence intervals have been presented as vertical bars on graphs. The Ministry of Health calculated all the results.

Adjusted rate ratios are a type of analysis that illustrates differences between groups, adjusting for differences in age (and other variables) between groups. A rate ratio above 1.0 means that whatever is being measured (e.g. use of active transport) is higher in the primary interest group than in the comparison group.

For additional information, see the Metadata sheet.

References

Ministry of Health. 2025. *New Zealand Health Survey Annual Data Explorer*. URL: https://minhealthnz.shinyapps.io/nz-health-survey-2024-25-annual-data-explorer (accessed 19 November 2025).

Sport New Zealand. 2025. *Active New Zealand: Annual report on the 2024/25 New Zealand participation survey.* URL: https://sportnz.org.nz/media/wfzflqoq/sport-nz-active-nz-report-24_25-final-v2.pdf (accessed 13 January 2026).

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