

# Active transport to and from school

This factsheet presents statistics on school-aged children (5–14 years) who use active transport (eg, walking or cycling) to and from school. The two data sources used are the New Zealand Health Survey and the New Zealand Household Travel Survey.

## Key facts



In 2017/18, less than half (43.2%) of children aged 5–14 years usually used active transport to and from school. There has been no change in the level of active transport in over 10 years, from 2006/07 to 2017/18.



Active modes of transport to school are being used much less in recent years than in 1989/90 according to the New Zealand Household Travel Survey. The percentage of 5–12-year-olds who walked to school dropped from 42% in 1989/90, to 29% in 2010–14. Cycling dropped from 12% in 1989/90 to 2% in 2010–14.



In 2017/18, the use of active transport was similar for all ethnic groups and across neighbourhood deprivation quintiles.



Children living in Northland (27.1%), Wairarapa (30.2%) and Tairāwhiti (34.8%) district health boards had significantly lower rates than the national rate for active transport to and from school in 2014–17.

## Active transport is good for our 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.

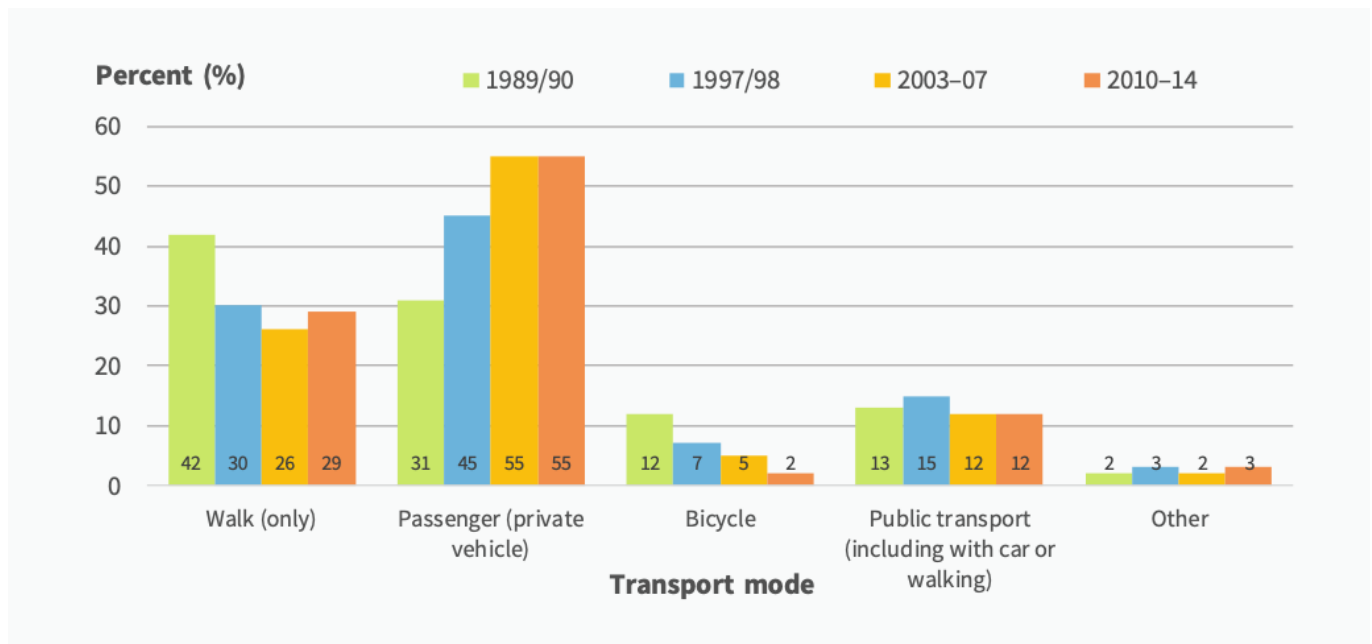
## Dramatic drop in active transport use to school from 1989/90 to 2010–14

Children are much less likely to use active modes of transport to get to school in recent years 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)**



**Note:** More recent data from the New Zealand Household Travel Survey is not yet available.  
**Source:** New Zealand Household Travel Survey (Ministry of Transport 2018)

## Less than half of 5–14-year-olds used active transport to and from school

The following data from the New Zealand Health Survey describe the use of active transport to and from school, among children aged 5–14 years. *Active transport* is defined 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 2019).

In 2017/18, 43.2% of children aged 5–14 years usually used a physically active form of transport to get to and from school (Figure 2). This is about 273,000 children (Table 1).

**Figure 2: Usually used physically active transport to get to and from school, children aged 5–14 years, 2006/07–2017/18 (unadjusted prevalence)**



**Note:** There is no data available between 2006/07 and 2011/12 because the New Zealand Health Survey only became annual in 2011/12.

**Source:** New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health 2019)

## No change in the use of active modes of transport in over 10 years

Adjusting for age differences, there has been no significant change in the use of active transport to and from school among 5–14-year-olds in over 10 years, from 2006/07 to 2017/18.

In 2017/18, 43.6% of boys (95% confidence interval: 40.5–46.7) and 42.8% of girls (38.7–47.1) usually used physically active modes of transport to and from school. Adjusting for age differences, there was no significant difference between boys and girls (adjusted rate ratio 1.02, 0.90–1.15). This similarity in rates of active transport between girls and boys has been consistent over time.

## Older children were more likely to use active transport to school

Older children aged 10–14 years were significantly more likely to usually use active transport to and from school (49.1%, 45.9–52.2), than younger children aged 5–9 years (37.7%, 34.0–41.5), in 2017/18.

## Use of active transport is similar for each ethnic and neighbourhood deprivation group

There were similar levels in the use of active transport to and from school in all ethnic groups (Table 1). Adjusting for age and sex variations, there were no significant differences for Māori, Pacific or Asian children compared to their comparison groups (Table 1).

**Table 1: Usually used physically active transport to get to and from school, children aged 5–14 years, by ethnic group (total response), 2017/18**

Ethnic group (total response)	Unadjusted prevalence (%; 95% CI)	Estimated number of children	Comparison groups for adjusted rate ratio	Adjusted rate ratio (RR, 95% CI) <sup>^</sup>
Total	43.2 (40.6–45.8)	273,000		
Māori	44.8 (41.0–48.6)	70,000	Māori vs non-Māori	1.06 (0.94–1.18)
Pacific	43.8 (37.9–50.0)	38,000	Pacific vs non-Pacific	1.02 (0.87–1.19)
Asian	43.1 (35.6–51.0)	35,000	Asian vs non-Asian	0.99 (0.83–1.19)
European/Other	42.8 (39.8–45.8)	198,000		Not available

<sup>^</sup> Rate ratios (RR) are used to compare results for different population subgroups. Adjusted rate ratios are adjusted for age and sex differences that could influence the comparison. An adjusted ratio above 1.0 shows that the indicator is more likely in the group of interest than in the reference group. An adjusted ratio below 1.0 shows the indicator is less likely in the group of interest than the reference group.

\* Indicates a statistically significant result for an adjusted rate ratio greater or lower than 1.0

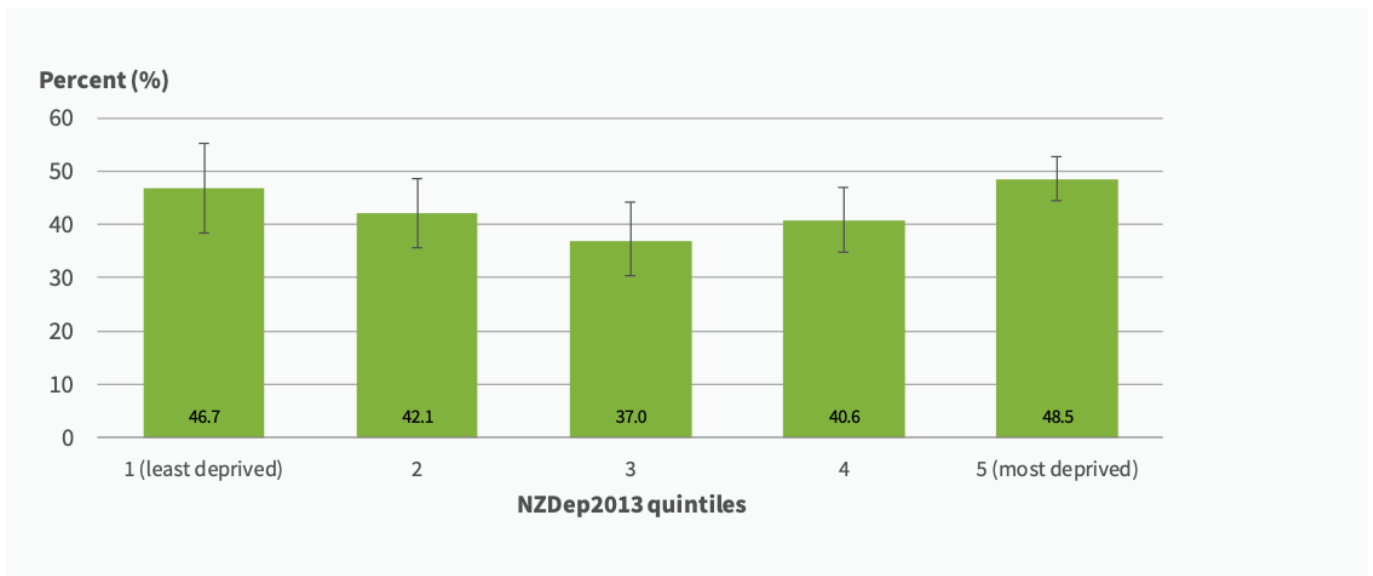
**Notes:** 95% confidence intervals (CI) are given in brackets. Estimated numbers will add to more than the total for ethnic groups, due to total response ethnicity being used (where everyone is included in every ethnic group they report).

**Source:** New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health 2019)

Children living in the most deprived areas (NZDep2013 quintile 5) had the highest rate of active transport to get to and from school (48.5%), while children living in quintile 3 had the lowest rate (37.0%) (Figure 3).

There was no significant difference in the rate of active transport between the most deprived areas (NZDep2013 quintile 5) and least deprived areas (NZDep2013 quintile 1), after adjusting for age, sex, and ethnic group differences (adjusted rate ratio 1.06, 0.84–1.34).

**Figure 3: Usually used physically active transport to get to and from school, children aged 5–14 years, by neighbourhood deprivation (NZDep2013 quintiles), 2017/18 (unadjusted prevalence)**



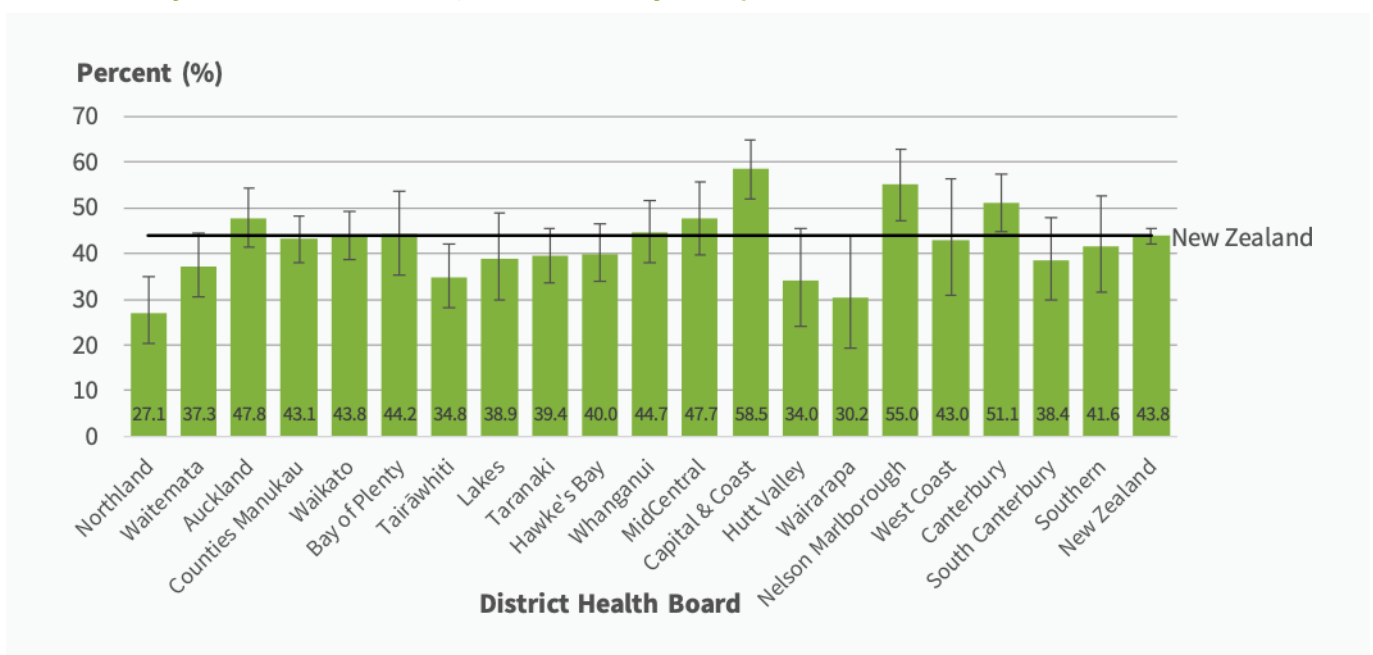
Source: New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health 2019)

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

In 2014–17, the use of physically active transport to and from school by school-aged children varied by district health board (DHB).

The following DHBs had significantly higher rates of active transport use compared to the national rate: Capital & Coast DHB (58.5%), Nelson Marlborough DHB (55.0%) and Canterbury DHB (51.1%) (Figure 4). Northland DHB (27.1%), Wairarapa DHB (30.2%) and Tairāwhiti DHB (34.8%) had significantly lower rates than the New Zealand rate (Figure 4). Standardising for age differences between DHBs gave similar findings.

**Figure 4: Usually used physically active transport to get to and from school, children aged 5–14 years, by District Health Board, 2014–17 (unadjusted prevalence)**



Source: New Zealand Health Survey (Ministry of Health 2019)

## Data for this factsheet

This factsheet includes two sources of data on active transport to school. Statistics on specific transport modes used by 5–12-year-olds to get to school are from the New Zealand Household Travel Survey, indicator '[HD011 Mode share of journeys to school, aged 5-12](#)'.

Statistics on active transport (walking, cycling and other non-motorised modes) to and from school for children aged 5–14 years are from the New Zealand Health Survey. Statistics come from the [2017/18 New Zealand Health Survey data tables](#) (Ministry of Health 2019), and the 2014–17 New Zealand Health Survey regional results data tables (Ministry of Health 2018).

## References

British Medical Association. 2012. *Healthy transport = healthy lives*. <http://bma.org.uk/transport>

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Ministry of Health. 2019. *Annual Data Explorer 2017/18: New Zealand Health Survey*. Wellington: Ministry of Health. URL: <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/annual-update-key-results-2017-18-new-zealand-health-survey> (accessed 18/01/2018).

Ministry of Transport. 2018. *Transport Dashboard and Indicators – 1. Household travel (HD011 Mode share of journeys to school, aged 5-12)*. Wellington: Ministry of Transport. URL: <https://www.transport.govt.nz/mot-resources/transport-dashboard/1-household-travel/hd011-mode-share-of-journeys-to-school-aged-5-12/> (accessed 28 June 2019).

## Other transport topics include:

[Mode of transport to work](#)

[Household travel time by transport mode](#)

[Lack of transport for GP services](#)

[Road traffic deaths and hospitalisations](#)

[Motor vehicles](#)

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## Further information

For descriptive information about the data [Metadata sheet](#)

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