

Top 10 Child Health Problems: What Australian Parents Think

By Faye Williamson

In a survey conducted in February 2021 by The Royal Children's Hospital, it's been revealed that traditional health concerns for children have dropped to the bottom of the concern list for parents.

Modifiable lifestyle factors including poor diet, lack of activity and screen time proving to be what worries parents the most.

Key Findings

The poll of 1980 parents of 3439 children aged one month to less than 18 years found:

- The number one health concern for parents in 2021 is excessive screen time with more than 90% of parents reporting it was a big problem, or somewhat of a problem in the community.
- Cyberbullying and bullying (53%) was the second top health concern parents have for all children, followed by internet safety (52%).
- Lifestyle issues such as unhealthy diets (41%) and lack of physical activity (38%) are listed in the top health problems identified by parents.
- Mental health was a notable concern, with approximately 38% identifying depression or suicide as a big problem for children in the community, with anxiety and depression listed as common problems.

- One in 10 parents report stress and sleep are big problems for their own children.

Parents' concern around excessive screen time was at similar levels five years ago, internet safety was raised as a big problem by over 50% of parents in this latest poll, reflecting increasing awareness around kids' safety online.

Along with online behaviour, many of the top 10 health problems were related to lifestyle factors. Parents recognised the links between these, with parents who reported that lack of physical activity was a big problem were more than six times more likely to identify unhealthy diets as a big problem as well.

The poll also revealed that parents were less likely to report the top health issues as a problem for their own children compared to children in the community.

Over one in three parents noted lack of physical activity and exercise as a big problem for all children, however, only one in eight noted it as a big problem for their own children. Similarly, 41% of parents thought unhealthy diets were a big problem for all children, with only nine per cent of parents seeing it as a big problem for their own children. ■

Source: *Top 10 Child Health Problems: What Australian Parents Think, 2021, The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne.*

Top 10 health issues of concern for all children and own children

All children

1. Excessive screen time	57%
2. Bullying/cyberbullying	53%
3. Internet safety	50%
4. Unhealthy diet	41%
5. Child abuse and neglect	38%
6. Depression	38%
7. Not enough physical activity/exercise	38%
8. Suicide	38%
9. Overweight or obesity	37%
10. Family and domestic violence	37%

Own children

1. Excessive screen time	25%
2. Anxiety	15%
3. ADHD and ASD*	14%
4. Internet safety	13%
5. COVID-19	12%
6. Not enough physical activity/exercise	12%
7. Food and other allergies	11%
8. Bullying/cyberbullying	11%
9. Stress	11%
10. Sleep problems	10%

Note: Health issues reported as big problems by parents

*ADHD and ASD: Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and Autism spectrum disorder