

# Plain Language Research Summary

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## Part 1 -

### **Citation:**

Tooth L, Hockey R, Moss K, Mishra G (2019). How adherence to Australian screen time guidelines differs by age in Australian children aged 0 to 12 years. Medical Journal of Australia, 211(4), 181-182.

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**Open Access:** No

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**Social Media Handles:** Not relevant as this paper had all the social media in Aug-Sept 2019.

**Audience:** Parents of children

**Keywords:** Screen time, children.

## Part 2 - Lay Summary Text

**Heading:** Screen time in young children exceeds National guidelines

### **What you need to know?:**

- Australian guidelines specify infants up to 2 years of age should have no screen time. We showed a rapid increase in reported screen time by infants up to 2 years (average 50 minutes/weekday and 58 minutes/weekend day at 1 year; and 91 minutes/week day and 105 minutes/weekend day at 2 years).
- Weekday screen time plateaued around 3 years (average 94 minutes/weekday and 105 minutes/weekend day) and from ages 5-12 was largely within guidelines (average 74-115 minutes).
- At all ages 0-12 children's mean weekend day screen time exceeded national guidelines.

### **What this research is about?:**

Australian government guidelines for recreational screen time recommend

- zero time for children aged up to 2,
- up to 1 hour/day for children aged 2-4
- up to 2 hours/day for children aged 5-12 years.

However, there is very little Australian data about how children's screen time compares to these guidelines. We examined screen time in Australian children aged 0-12 years to determine how much they are doing, if (and when) the amount of screen time they do changes, and what factors (of the child, the mother or home environment) might be linked with not following the guidelines.

### **What did the researchers do?:**

We asked mothers from across Australia (N=3,063) to tell us about how much recreational (non-school) screen time their children (N=5,410) have on weekdays and weekend days. Screen time was defined as "time spent watching/using any screen-based equipment, such as television, computers, tablets, mobile phones and electronic games". We compared the amount of screen time the mothers reported against national Australian screen time guidelines for child ages up to 2, >2-4 and 5-12 years. We further separately analysed the data for children aged 0-12 months and 13-24 months, as there is very little published data about screen time in children this young.

### **What did the research find?:**

Mothers reported that:

- Screen time increased rapidly during infancy: by 1 year of age children had 50 minutes on average on weekdays and 58 minutes on weekend days.
- By 2 years of age, this had increased to an average of 91 and 105 minutes per day on week and weekend days, respectively.
- Weekday screen time plateaued around 3 years (average of 94 minutes) and from ages 5-12 was largely within guidelines (that is, less than 2 hours at an average of 74 to 115 minutes).
- The finding that weekday screen time was mostly within the guidelines at the ages of 5-12 is probably because the children are attending school.
- However, while weekday screen time in children 5-12 year was mostly within the guidelines, weekend day screen time was not. It continued to rise as children aged.
- A combination of factors were found to be associated with whether children followed national guidelines or not. These factors varied by age of the child. They included financial stress, mothers having high amounts of leisure time, and parenting practices such as less reading with the child and starting reading with them at older ages, and allowing electronic devices in the child's bedroom

### **How can you use this research?:**

For parents: The rapid increase in screen time in children before 4 years of age is of particular concern as it is putting them at risk of poorer developmental outcomes. Not following national guidelines, particularly on weekend days across all ages may be replacing active play with sedentary time, with potential health implications.