

# Media Release

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## Experts warn school holiday period could be the most dangerous for young pedestrians in years

*After unspeakable tragedy, one Aussie mum is on a mission to keep children safe around our busy roads this Christmas.*

It's the shocking statistic that all parents need to know: almost every week a child is killed in a road crash in Australia and this coming holiday season could be the most dangerous in years.

Aussie mum Michelle McLaughlin knows first-hand the heartbreaking reality of losing a child to road trauma, after the death of her four-year-old son Tom in a pedestrian road crash on the NSW Central Coast in 2014.

This summer, Michelle and experts from the University of NSW's Transport and Road Safety Research Centre are putting the warning out to all Australian holiday makers to slow down, be vigilant and save lives as this coming holiday period is set to be the busiest since pre-COVID.

Land transport crashes are the leading cause of death for Australian children aged one to 14.

Between 2012 to 2021, 422 children under 15 years of age were involved in a road fatality crash, with 28.3 per cent of these fatalities occurring when the child was a pedestrian. In 2021, 43 children lost their lives in road crashes in Australia.

"After COVID and natural disasters put summer travel plans on hold for the past three years, it's set to be a frantic school holiday season on Australian roads," says Michelle.

"With this surge in traffic comes an increase in risk, and the potential for a disastrous rise in road trauma incidents involving children."

Michelle and her husband David established the Little Blue Dinosaur Foundation with an aim to prevent other children falling victim to the same tragic fate as their beautiful boy Tom.

Michelle has been doggedly campaigning for children's road safety via community education and effective road safety initiatives (including the distinctive Little Blue Dinosaur Foundation signage) since 2014.

Gladstone Region Councillor Natalia Muszkat said residents and visitors need to pay attention to the warnings and take care on and around roads this holiday period.

"Motorists will notice the 'Holiday Time: Slow Down, Kids Around' signage placed next to prominent roads across the region, offering a highly visible and timely reminder about the importance of road safety," Councillor Muszkat said.



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“With more kids around it is important for all motorists to stay aware and be vigilant on the road as kids can react impulsively and forget about road safety.

“The Holiday Time campaign is so important because it puts the onus on drivers, parents and carers to recognise the potential danger in busy holiday spots and take extra precautions to ensure our kids are kept safe.”

Gladstone Region Councillor Desley O’Grady added that Gladstone Regional Council was proud to be the first council in Queensland to display the ‘Holiday Time: Slow Down, Kids Around’ signage.

“We’ve been on this journey with Michelle and David since December 2016 and I have no doubt these colourful signs have made a difference to driver behaviour,” Cr O’Grady said.

“I really admire the work they have done to honour the memory of Tom and encourage other councils to support this very important campaign.”

#### **What can you do to increase child pedestrian safety:**

- Just as it is vital for children to wear a seatbelt when in a vehicle, it is equally as important for children to practise safe behaviour as pedestrians around cars on our roads
- Children under 10 need to hold an adult’s hand when near a busy road and children over 10 need to be reminded about the importance of being attentive near roads
- Parents should talk to their children about road safety but also remember it is just as important for adults to be aware and vigilant. Children are still learning and developing the abilities required to identify safe crossings and anticipate driver behaviour
- Be cautious when on holiday or in new environments, particularly around areas of high pedestrian and vehicular activity. Road crashes take only a microsecond to happen
- Speed is one of the greatest contributors to fatalities on our roads. The risk of death or serious injury is higher for children, even at very low speeds
- Drivers should be on high alert for the safety of young pedestrians. Child pedestrians can move unpredictably, and their smaller size makes them harder for drivers to see
- Drivers need to slow down around busy areas and be extra attentive when parking and crossing driveways.

Since 2014, Little Blue Dinosaur Foundation has facilitated road safety signs in 63 local government areas, reaching millions of holidaymakers.

They are calling on more LGAs across the country to install this critical safety signage in areas of high pedestrian activity.

Visit [www.littlebluedinosaur.org](http://www.littlebluedinosaur.org) for more information about the Little Blue Dinosaur Foundation.

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