



THE HON PAUL FLETCHER MP
Minister for Communications, Urban Infrastructure, Cities and the Arts

MEDIA RELEASE

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Online safety during lockdowns

With lockdowns in major Australian cities leading to a surge in internet use, it is important to be prepared for a likely increase in online harms, Minister for Communications, Urban Infrastructure, Cities and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher, warned today.

New statistics from eSafety, released by Minister Fletcher, demonstrate that online risks continued to rise through the first half of 2021, even in the absence of extended lockdowns.

Complaints of serious cyberbullying against Australian children have been up by almost 30 per cent on the same period in 2020, while complaints of cyber abuse directed against adults are up by almost half.

Reports to eSafety under its prohibited online content scheme -- the vast bulk of which captures child sexual abuse material -- were up by more than 30 per cent in the first half of this year.

Minister Fletcher urged Australians to maintain similar standards of civility online as are commonly observed in everyday life, and encouraged parents to remain closely involved in the online activities of children.

“Previous lockdowns have reinforced that the internet is overwhelmingly a positive aspect of our lives, but they have also highlighted some of the negatives,” Minister Fletcher said.

“From March 2020, during the first wave of COVID and resulting lockdowns, the eSafety Commissioner experienced an unprecedented increase in reports of all online harm types, including abuse, cyberbullying, image-based abuse and unwanted exposure to illegal and harmful content.”

Keeping Australians safe online is a priority of the Morrison Government.

Last month the Parliament passed the *Online Safety Act 2021*. The Act will improve online safety for Australians by providing new and strengthened powers for the eSafety Commissioner to deal with cyberbullying, online abuse, image-based abuse and harmful online content. The new Act will take effect from early 2022.

In the 2021-22 Budget, the Government invested an extra \$15 million over two years for eSafety to bolster its investigations teams to respond to reports of image-based abuse, adult cyber abuse, cyberbullying and harmful online content. eSafety has a budget of \$125 million over the next four years.

The eSafety Commissioner provides a range of online safety guidance, such as [steps to keep your family safe online](#) that include:

- Starting the chat about online safety as a family.
- Creating a Family Technology Agreement to help you and your kids decide when and how digital technology will be used at home.
- Setting up parental controls to monitor and limits what kids see and do online.
- Choosing games and other apps carefully.

- Using digital technology together.

The eSafety Commissioner also has a range of tailored information and resources on online safety, including free online webinars for parents and carers.

To find out more, visit www.esafety.gov.au.

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