



## Australia Lets Kids Have “Friends Bubbles” if Parents Are Vaxxed

Australia’s most populous state, New South Wales (NSW), which went into lockdown mode this summer with draconian restrictions and even more draconian measures to punish violators, has just allowed young people to get together with two other friends. That is, if all of the provided conditions of such meetings are met.

The establishment of the so-called friends bubbles was [announced](#) on Tuesday by the NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian as a reward for the improved vaccination rate throughout the state. The measure took effect at noon on September 21, and covers people aged 18 years and under who live in stay-at-home areas and the so-called areas of concern across NSW.

Young people, who were not allowed to socialize other than online, are now granted permission to chose two friends and visit each other’s homes “for play and activity” if the following conditions are in place, per the NSW government:

- Each child is allowed to have two designated friends come to their house. These two friends must always be the same, creating a three-person “friends bubble”;
- All people older than 18 years in all the households must be fully vaccinated;
- The friends must reside within 5km of each other or in the same Local Government Area (LGA); and
- If parents/carers are dropping children off, they must not stay to interact with other parents or carers.

While the new policy may seem to many in a free society as unacceptable government overreach, Premier Berejiklian saw the measure as an act of care and compassion. She said, “Parents and children have had a difficult few months, trying to balance both work, often from home, as well as home schooling,” adding, “This change will hopefully make a big difference for families during the school holidays and allow young children and teenagers to catch up and reconnect with their friends.”

Berejiklian failed to mention that it was her government that has kept children disconnected from each other for no legitimate reason while actually hurting their health and wellbeing. Australia, and NSW in particular, has seen a rapidly [rising number](#) of mental disorders and suicides among all demographics, with a disturbing number of young people taking their lives during the lockdowns. It has been reported that children as young as five are being treated for anxiety.

Two top NSW government officials overseeing healthcare and education praised the premier’s move as



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Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on September 22, 2021

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a kind and wise gesture.

Health Minister Brad Hazzard noted that the government tried hard in balancing “between the best possible health outcomes, whilst easing the pressures on families and individuals living in lockdown.” Many would disagree, arguing that the “best possible health outcomes” would be achieved if the lockdowns were lifted altogether. After all, the experience of Sweden, which has never imposed lockdowns on its people and now sees zero COVID deaths, may be considered as an inspiring example in approaching the pandemic. But NSW and other Australian states are evidently choosing a completely different path.

Commenting on the announcement, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Sarah Mitchell claimed the “friends bubbles” will also benefit older students, allowing them to create a “study bubble” ahead of tests for their high-school graduation.

Neither of the officials expressed a concern that children of the unvaccinated parents would be excluded from the new rule.

Local media [reports](#) that NSW children met the news with excitement. One said, “It’s been very hard because since we’ve been in lockdown all school term, we haven’t been able to hang out and see all our school friends in person.” Others remarked on how sad it was to only be able to see their friends’ faces on a computer screen. Now, the “friends bubbles” will give them a chance to finally see their pals in person — well, at least a couple of them.

Australian outlet for parents [Mamamia](#), however, pointed out the new policy comes with many caveats. Some of the parents said they felt “awkward” that they would have to inquire about the vaccination status of other parents.

Others stated that the whole idea of rating friends goes against their belief of inclusivity and equality. One of the mothers stated: “We avoid language such as best/second best friend, and always try to be as inclusive as possible. I’m just not going to ask my children to rank their friends,” while adding that she is not at all comfortable with many of the children being left out and will not be participating in or creating any “bubbles.”

Also, while many of the children have playdates booked all week, the others don’t see anyone because all of their friends are busy seeing somebody else. Some of the friends don’t live in the same LGA. Some have unvaccinated or partially vaccinated parents. Some of the children are being rejected because they are not “popular enough.” In the end, for many children and their families, the “well-intended” measure has turned into an additional stressor.

The “friends bubble” policy comes as a part of the lifted lockdown restrictions [announced](#) earlier this week in preparation for NSW’s so-called [Freedom Day](#), when the state reaches a 70-percent vaccination rate, and all vaccinated Aussies will be allowed to return back to normal. The Orwellian “Freedom Day” is [predicted](#) to come October 18.



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