



Guidelines for Youth Involvement in Ultra Running Events

Version 1
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The Australian Ultra Runners' Association (AURA) recognises that the issue of children and youth participating in ultra running events is extremely complex. Consideration must be given to both physical (anatomical/physiological) and psychological aspects of such participation.

For ease, the word “youth” will be used in this guideline to describe children and youth generally – all individuals under the age of 18.

AURA recognises that obesity amongst youth represents a serious health concern and that regular physical activity is essential to the development of the musculoskeletal system and to motor skills and enhances mental health and wellbeing. Ultra running events are defined in this document as those of a distance exceeding the standard marathon distance (>42.195km) and/or exceeding six hours' duration.

AURA endorses a scientific evidence-based approach in addressing the issue of youth involvement in such events. Due to continual advances in knowledge, it is essential to review the most recent research possible. In developing this guideline, AURA reviewed the following sources of information:

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2011). Policy statement: Climatic heat stress and exercising children and adolescents. *Pediatrics*, 128(3), e741-e747, doi:10.1542/peds.2011-1664.

Kostka, T., Furgal, W., Gawronski, W., Bugajski, A., Czamara, A., Klukowski, K., Kryzstofiak, H., Lewicki, R., Szugula, Z., Tomaszewski, W., Trzaska, T., Wideuchowski, J., Ziemba, A., & Jegier, A. (2011). Consensus statement: Recommendations of the Polish Society of Sports Medicine on age criteria while qualifying children and youth for participation in various sports. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, doi:10.1136/bjsports-2011-090043.

Steffen, K. & Engebretsen, L. (2010). Review: More data needed on injury risk among young elite athletes. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 44, 485-489, doi:10.1136/bjism.2010.073833.

Steffen, K., Soligard, T., & Engebretsen, L. (2012). Health protection of the Olympic athlete. *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, 46, 466-470, doi:10.1136/bjsports-2012-091168.



At a minimum, the race director (RD) of an event must give due consideration to the following:

- Have the parents given informed consent for their youth to participate?
- Attainment of puberty is a hallmark period in youth development. As such, it has more bearing on fitness to compete than merely chronological age. Most children begin puberty by 13 years of age and complete puberty between 15-18 years of age. Girls typically attain puberty earlier than boys. Thus, it is essential to consider whether the youth has begun or attained puberty when considering their participation in an ultra running event.
- What experience does the youth have with long distance training and events (e.g., running, rogaining, orienteering, extended bushwalks/overnight camping)?
- Has a doctor reviewed the youth's medical condition in regards to fitness to compete?
- How well does the event cater to youth involvement? For example: distance between aid stations, medical personnel on hand during the event to evaluate the youth en route, vehicle access to the running route, mobile phone coverage throughout the course, inclusion of an experienced chaperone/pacer, and cut-off times at aid stations being generous enough to allow an easy pace.

Given the information available at the time of writing this guideline:

AURA does *not* support the involvement of youth under the age of 12 in ultra running events (i.e., greater than marathon distance and/or longer than 6 hours duration).

AURA has strong reservations towards the involvement of youth between the ages of 13-15 years of age in ultra running events.

AURA has minor reservations towards the involvement of youth between the ages of 16-17 years of age in ultra running events.

Further, AURA does not support any youth under the age of 18 participating in an ultra running event for any purported record-breaking attempt, as this would represent an added psychological stressor that could act against them withdrawing from an event when faced with injury.