

## **NEW DATA ON CHILDREN'S HEIGHT AND WEIGHT PUBLISHED**

80 per cent of children measured

Around 80 per cent of school children – an increase of 32 per cent compared to the previous year - in Reception and Year six have been weighed and measured as part of a scheme to fight obesity, Public Health Minister Dawn Primarolo announced today.

The National Child Measurement Programme, established in 2005, checks children's height and weight to enable local health services to identify children who are, or who are at risk of becoming overweight.

This is one of the largest sets of child growth data in the world, with enormous potential as a tool for tracking and analysing trends in childhood obesity. It is a key tool in the Government's strategy to help people lose weight and live healthy lives.

The figures, recorded in 2006/07, show that:

- in Reception year (age four to five) one in four children (22.9%) were overweight or obese;
- in year six (age ten to 11) one in three children (31.6%) were overweight;
- in both age groups, boys are more likely than girls to be obese;
- London has the highest obesity prevalence for both age groups – 11.3 per cent in year one and 20.8 per cent in year six;
- the south east coast area has the lowest obesity prevalence for Reception – 8.5 per cent; and
- the south west area has the lowest prevalence for year six – 14.9 per cent.

The recently published obesity strategy – backed by £372 million Government funding – will help everyone to lead healthier lives. There is a particular focus on children with an aim to reduce the proportion of those who are overweight and obese back to 2000 levels by 2020.

Progress has already been made with 86 per cent of schoolchildren now doing at least two hours of sport per week. Food and drink advertising to children has been restricted and there are robust guidelines in place so all children can benefit from healthy and balanced school meals.

Public Health Minister Dawn Primarolo said:

“Whilst these figures come as no surprise, it is encouraging that 80 per cent of children in years one and six have been weighed and measured. So far over nine hundred thousand children have been weighed and measured as part of this programme.

“Knowing how many children are overweight or obese and spotting trends is key to ensuring that families, communities, public services, industry and government take the right action in tackling obesity.

“We recently published the £372 million obesity strategy, which supports creation of a healthy society for children and adults in all fields - from early years, to schools and food, from sport and physical activity to planning, transport, the health service and other areas.

“We're not going to stem the tide overnight but through measures such as providing the right information and support to parents to ensure a healthy diet and regular exercise for children and increasing participation in sport and healthy eating, we hope to support families to lead healthier lives.”

Kevin Brennan, Children's Minister said:

“We have already taken considerable steps to tackle obesity in children and young people. Not only have we banned junk food from vending machines in schools, we have also brought in robust nutritional guidelines so all children can benefit from healthy and balanced school meals.

“In our recent obesity strategy, cooking, from September will be compulsory in most schools because this fundamental skill is at the heart of teaching students to understand food, diet and nutrition.

“Since 2005 over £600 million has gone to schools and local authorities to adjust to tough, new nutritional standards, including the cost of ingredients and building kitchens, in the areas where there's the most need.

“On top of this we've just announced £21 million for the School Food Trust to help further drive up the quality of school food along with a further £2 million capital investment for the Trust to expand the School FEAST network of training centres for the school food workforce. The cash will be invested in new training facilities to equip staff with the skills they need to produce healthy, tasty food.

“Improving school facilities and local play areas are also crucial for tackling obesity and we want more children to play out doors and enjoy sport. This year we gave £30 million to help the most needy sports colleges, spread over the next three years, to improve their facilities for PE and sport so they can be used in the evenings and all year round.

It's a real achievement for those 86 per cent of kids who now enjoy at least two hours of high quality PE and sport each week. We now have plans to increase this to five hours each week by 2011.”

Ends

Notes to editors

1. For media enquiries only contact the Press Office on tel: 020 7210 5221
2. A copy of the guidance is available at: [www.ic.nhs.uk](http://www.ic.nhs.uk)
3. The National Child Measurement Programme began in 2005. Children in Reception (4-5 year olds) and Year 6 (10-11 year olds) have their height and weight measured in schools as part of the NCMP, which takes place every year.
4. Parents are able to request their child's height and weight measurements. Letters are sent to parents informing them that the programme will be happening in their child's school and giving them the opportunity to withdraw their child from the programme or to request the results if they are happy for their child to take part. Following the exercise, PCTs provide the results to parents who have requested them.
5. Trained staff, such a school nurse, will weigh and measure children. Care is taken that it is done in a sensitive way with the measurements being taken in a separate room or screened off area. Pupils will not be told about other pupils' weight and height and the results will not be shown to teachers or other school staff.
6. Once a child's height and weight have been recorded, the results will be held by their local Primary Care Trust (PCT) along with some other information, including date of birth and the school. The PCT will then send this information securely to the Information Centre for Health and Social Care, who will look after and analyse it on behalf of the Department of Health. During the upload to the Information Centre, the bits of the data that could identify the child, such as their name and date of birth will be removed or changed, so that they cannot be identified. Once the Information Centre has this anonymous information, they will analyse it to look at trends in children's height and weight across England.

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