

Briefing: childhood obesity

September 2020

Summary

Childhood obesity is a public health time bomb, storing up health problems for the future. The data shows that childhood obesity in England is increasing.

RCPCH welcomed the announcement of the Government's obesity strategy last month. But the Government must go further to address the links between deprivation and obesity, and introduce policies with a more explicit focus on early years to reduce childhood obesity rates.

Prevalence and data

- In 2018/19, 22.6% of 4-5 year olds in England were recorded as either overweight or obese.
- In 2018/19, 34.3% of 10-11 year olds were recorded as either overweight or obese.
- Trends for 10-11 year olds indicate that childhood obesity in England is increasing.
- Obese children are much more likely to become obese adults.

Childhood obesity and deprivation

- The most deprived children aged 4-5 years in England were 1.6 times more likely to be overweight than the least deprived.
- This prevalence increases when we look at children who are severely obese – nearly four times as many 4-5 year olds in England who are severely obese live in the most deprived areas than in the least deprived areas of the country.
- In England, the rate of overweight or obese children is increasing for the most deprived children whilst at the same time decreasing for the least deprived children, widening the inequality gap.

Response to Government obesity strategy

- RCPCH was pleased to see the commitment of the current Government to tackling obesity in this country. Childhood obesity is a public health time bomb and we are storing up health problems for the future.
- RCPCH particularly welcome the Government's commitment to introduce a 9pm watershed for junk food advertising.
- We would like to see more measures relating to early years, and measures addressing the systemic links between obesity and deprivation.

Recommendations to Government:

- National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) should be maintained across England, ensuring data collection upon entry and exit of primary school. NCMP data should be embedded within electronic health records.
- UK Government should review and evaluate the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme to ensure all children in England are receiving daily fruit and vegetables, that is fresh and to a certain quality standard.
- Government should develop mandatory guidelines on the free sugar content of infant foods for under 2s to encourage the reformulation of baby food, including commercial weaning foods.
- Advertising of infant foods high in free sugars should be restricted.
- UK Government should resource Local Authorities to review planning and licensing arrangements to ban fast food outlets (FFOs) from within 400m of schools and other locations with a high child footfall.
- UK Government should resource Local Authorities to maintain and expand on current sports and leisure facilities available for children and young people to exercise at.
- The Department for Education should continue to provide the Primary PE and Sport Premium at the doubled rate (£320 million) for 2020-21. UK Government should outline plans for funding beyond 2021.
- The Department for Education should expand school curriculum to incorporate nutrition and healthy diet education, within the Relationships and Health Education curricula. The quality of nutrition / healthy diet education should be monitored by Ofsted.
- Mandatory school food standards are extended to all free schools, academies and early years settings, with compliance monitored through Ofsted inspections.

About RCPCH

The [Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health \(RCPCH\)](#) is the membership body for paediatricians, representing more than 19,500 child health professionals in the UK and abroad. We are responsible for the training, examinations and professional standards of paediatricians across the country, and we use our research and experience to develop recommendations to promote better child health outcomes.

Our mission is to transform child health through knowledge, innovation and expertise and to ensure that children are at the heart of the health service.

All the data referred to in this briefing is from RCPCH's [State of Child Health 2020](#) project. You can visit the page of the microsite relating to childhood obesity [here](#).

For further information please contact:

Caitlin Plunkett-Reilly, Public Affairs and Campaigns Lead
Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, London, WC1X 8SH
Tel: 020 7092 6006 | Email: caitlin.plunkett-reilly@rcpch.ac.uk