

Press release: Record high levels of severe obesity found in year 6 children

New data published today show the rate of severe obesity among year 6 children (aged 10 to 11) has increased by more than a third since 2006 to 2007 to 4.2%, its highest rate ever.

The latest data from the national child measurement programme (NCMP), overseen by Public Health England (PHE), also shows stubborn inequalities persist, with obesity in the poorest areas more than double that of the richest areas.

This highlights the importance of the government's steps to tackle childhood obesity. The most important aspects of these are overseen by PHE, including its challenge to the food industry to reduce 20% of sugar and calories in everyday foods consumed regularly by children.

The NCMP provides the most comprehensive picture of the state of childhood obesity for the 2017 to 2018 school year in England. It found:

- the proportion of overweight and obese children in reception year (aged 4 to 5) has remained stable at 22.4% (equal to 136,586 children)
- for year 6 children, it is 34.3% (equal to 197,888 children) compared to 31.6% in 2016 to 2017
- in the most deprived areas, 12.8% of children in reception year are obese, compared to 5.7% in the least deprived areas
- in year 6 it is 26.8% in the most deprived areas, compared to 11.7% in the least deprived areas
- in both age groups, severe obesity is 4 times higher in deprived areas

This week, PHE met with major trade bodies, retailers, manufacturers, out of home sector businesses – including takeaways, cafes and pubs – and public health NGOs, to discuss the next phase of the calorie reduction programme.

The second chapter of the government's [childhood obesity plan](#) was published in June 2018 and includes mandatory calorie labelling in the out of home sector, a restriction on price promotions on unhealthy foods and a ban on the sale of energy drinks to children.

Steve Brine, Public Health Minister said:

Obesity is a problem that has been decades in the making – one that will take significant effort across government, schools, families and wider society to address. We cannot expect to see a reversal in trends overnight – but we have been clear that we are willing to do whatever it takes to keep children healthy and well in this country.

We have already removed tonnes of sugar from children's diets through the sugar tax, which has funded vital school sports and breakfast programmes, and this summer we announced the second chapter of our childhood obesity strategy with a series of bold plans to halve childhood obesity by 2030.

Dr Alison Tedstone, Chief Nutritionist at PHE, said:

These continuing high rates of childhood obesity, combined with widening health inequalities, highlight why government is taking bold steps to tackle this crisis.

This threat to our children's health has been decades in the making – we're moving in the right direction but reversing it will not happen overnight.

Children with excess weight are more likely to suffer from poor self-esteem, bullying and stigma in childhood. They are also more likely to be overweight or obese as adults, increasing their risk of preventable illnesses including heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

PHE's [Change4Life campaigns](#) help millions of families to make healthier choices through meal swap suggestions and the Food Scanner app, which reveals the sugar, salt and fat in foods and drinks. Change4Life also supports schools to embed healthier habits into everyday school life.

Eustace De Sousa, national lead for children at PHE, said:

These figures are a stark reminder that addressing childhood obesity is everyone's problem.

We owe it to current and future generations to act now. Everyone – from the food industry to local councils – should play their part, but families can also make positive changes with help from Change4Life.

Background

1. Latest NCMP data is published by [NHS Digital](#).

2. Severe obesity is BMI on or above the 99.6th percentile for a child's age and sex.
3. PHE published [Trends in children's body mass index](#) between 2006 to 2007 and 2016 to 2017 in July 2018.
4. PHE published [Childhood obesity: a plan for action, chapter 2](#) in June 2018.
5. PHE published [Sugar reduction: report on first year progress](#) in May 2018.
6. PHE published [Calorie reduction: the scope and ambition](#) for action in March 2018.