

Childhood obesity surveillance in the WHO European Region

Overweight in children and adolescents: most common childhood disorder in the Region

- Currently about 20% of children and adolescents are overweight, and of these a third are obese.
- Over 60% of children who are overweight before puberty will be overweight in early adulthood.
- Obesity in Europe has reached epidemic proportions; by 2010 nearly 40% of school-age children (15 million) will be overweight, and more than 25% of these will be obese.
- Childhood obesity is strongly associated with risk factors for cardiovascular diseases, type II diabetes, orthopaedic problems, mental disorders, underachievement in school and lower self-esteem.

Surveillance is required to monitor the situation and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions

- Obesity measurement tools, calculation and presentation of data are currently not standardized in the countries of the WHO European Region.
- Only around 25% of Member States have validated national prevalence data on overweight or obesity in children, based on objective measures (13 out of 53 countries have data for 6-10 years old children and 15 countries for 0-6 years).
- Less than one third of the countries world wide expand growth monitoring practices beyond 6 years of age.
- Only a few countries have in place surveillance systems that study the weight and height distribution of children at regular intervals of time.

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The European childhood obesity surveillance initiative will design, pilot and establish a standardized, sustainable system for monitoring the nutritional status of European primary schoolchildren, based on a common study protocol.

By setting up a systematic data collection, this initiative would allow to analyze, interpret and disseminate information for use in public health action, planning and evaluation.

The data provided by the system would help to tackle and monitor the obesity epidemic in children and evaluate the impact of obesity preventive interventions.

Methodology

Weight, height, waist, and hip circumferences will be measured by paediatricians, school nurses or other school personnel following standardized procedures in 5-7 year-old primary schoolchildren and repeated in two years in a new cohort (5-7 years) and in the same initial cohort (7-9 years).

Once a national representative sample of primary schools is selected at the time of implementation of the system, the same schools will remain to be the nationwide sentinel sites for the system.



How to participate in the initiative?

The initiative will start with a pilot phase, funded mainly by local resources and lasting approximately 3 years.

To participate or for more information, please contact nutrition@euro.who.int

