The National Child Measurement Programme: 
*Update from Cross-Government Obesity Unit*

June/July 2009
Update from Cross-Government Obesity Unit

1. *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: One Year On* report

2. Results of the 2007/08 NCMP

3. Routine feedback to parents – our perspective so far

Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives - One Year On Report

Tackling obesity is primarily an issue of personal responsibility: what people choose to eat and how active they choose to be.

However, government plays a significant role in helping support individuals and families in making those choices.

It does this by:

- helping people make healthier choices;
- creating an environment that promotes healthy weight;
- providing effective services for those at risk; and by
- strengthening delivery.

The NCMP is an important part of this strategy because it provides:

- local intelligence on obesity prevalence
- informs national picture on obesity prevalence
- an opportunity for engaging with parents.
## NCMP results from 2007/08

### Participation

- Nearly 1 million (973,073, 88%) eligible children measured

### National prevalence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reception</th>
<th>Year 6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obese</strong></td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Overweight and obese</strong></td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
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- No significant difference in national prevalence of overweight and obese in either age-group, compared with 2006/07

- Encouraging, but too early to be confident that obesity and overweight among children has stabilised, and prevalence of obesity still too high
Routine feedback – a national perspective

- Around 50% of PCTs implementing routine feedback to parents in all or a sample of their eligible NCMP population in 2008/09.

- Not mandatory for 2009/10
  - Still a locally led decision, but strong expectation that areas will now be implementing routine feedback, since they have had over a year to get plans and services in place.

- A reminder of why it is important to share results with parents …
  - Only 17% of parents with an obese child able to correctly tell their child’s weight status
  - Parents overestimate activity levels and underestimate the amount of high-fat, high-sugar foods the family eats
  - Parents have said that they want to receive this information – they expect it to be sent to them and to be followed-up if there is a problem.
  - Obesity rates too high – now is the time to act.
Routine feedback – a national perspective

- Some angry parents
  - Numbers seem to be small compared with number of letters sent out – eg, 40 contacts out of 12,000 letters in one PCT (less than 0.5%).
  - Some common themes: child just over threshold; parent says child is just big boned, puppy fat, will grow out of it; and parent insist child is very active and eats healthily.

- Media interest - Oxfordshire
  - Child was just into overweight category
  - Need to provide positive comments to media and defend approach.

- GPs’ / PNs’ / health visitors’ reactions
  - Need to engage these groups with NCMP.

- Change4Life
  - We know some areas are making good use of the Change4Life campaign to help support feedback.

So where's the fat? Mother sent warning letter as health police say son is just 1lb overweight

By Julie Moult
Last updated at 11:19 AM on 15th May 2009
Some positive contacts from parents:

“I have received your letter stating that my son [NAME] is very overweight. I am very concerned about this and would be grateful of any help or advice you can give me. [NAME] does however, get regular exercise as he plays for the local hockey team as well as participate in exercise at school and roller skating every Saturday, which all the family do. I do feed my children a healthy diet but I feel my portion sizes are probably a problem.”
“Thanks for your letter regarding my son [NAME] weight. To be honest, I had acknowledged myself that his weight was becoming a problem so we have made some positive changes as a family. As a single Mum working full time, I think because I'm not able to spend as much time with my kids as I would like, I buy treats like chocolate and their favourite crisps to make me feel better and less guilty. I do cook really healthy family meals but I know it's the snacks and lack of exercise that have contributed to the gradual weight gain. I haven't made a big deal out of it, I have made it a family 'getting healthy' for all of us.

As a family, we are now trying to take more exercise together. We go walking, swimming and bike riding and I am not buying the chocolate any more. The kids have a choice of fruit and yoghurt for dessert and fruit for snacks. I haven't cut out all the treats as gradual changes are better as we are aware. I just hope we can maintain it!”
Monitoring implementation

**RFB evaluation** (Institute of Education, University of London)

- **Aim**
  - explore local implementation issues for PCTs
  - assess parental views
  - use the research to inform existing practice.

- **Findings so far are positive, in that:**
  - Few parents disagreed with weight category, of those who did, likely to be “overweight”
  - Almost all parents supportive of NCMP and welcome routine feedback in this way
  - Small number had difficulties understanding letter or found tone too harsh
  - Most found health promotion material sent with letter useful (usually Top Tips leaflet).

- **Next stage:**
  - Follow-up interviews with parents to provide more detail on changes needed to letter
  - Interviews with PCTs and schools.
  - Final results published in **September**.
Monitoring implementation

• UCL Health Behaviour Unit – published research
  – to examine psychological impact of a school-based, weight-screening intervention that included feedback to parents
  – most parents were positive about receiving feedback
  – found that restrictive dietary changes were actions such as reducing unhealthy snacks and soft drinks, which are more likely to be beneficial than harmful
  – the researchers said that the numbers of upset parents or children might be reduced if weight feedback became more routine.

• PCT questionnaire – sent out by regional leads
  – PCTs’ experiences of routine feedback
  – will be invaluable in helping us to gauge the response to parental feedback and learn more about how PCTs are implementing it.

• Parental questionnaire (via NCMP newsletter)
  – To evaluate parental responses to letter.

• Log of contacts
Our next steps

July
• 2009/10 NCMP guidance for PCTs and for schools
  – Key change is to encourage more proactive follow-up of children following measurement

August
• Revised editable feedback letter and Feedback Tool
• Revised pre-measurement leaflet

September
• Results of RFB evaluation published with media release
  – With regional press release and lines to take
  – Deadline for upload of 2008/09 data to NHS IC (Sept 4)
• Upload Tool for 2009/10 released

December
• 2008/09 results published.
Resources to support feedback to parents and wider NCMP

• NCMP resources
  – Guidance (www.dh.gov.uk/healthyliving)
  – Feedback tool and editable results letter (www.icweb.nhs.uk/ncmp/)
  – Change4Life Top tips leaflet (new order number: C4LO34, Prolog 0300 123 1002)
  – Script and conversation guide (from your regional obesity lead)

• Healthy Weight Healthy Lives resources www.dh.gov.uk/obesity
  – Commissioning guidance
  – Toolkit for local areas
  – Training directory
  – NHS Choices Healthy weight calculator (www.nhs.uk).
Any questions?

Contact details

ncmp@dh.gsi.gov.uk

(Remember to contact your regional lead in the first instance)

Relevant links

www.dh.gov.uk/healthyliving