Tackling epidemic CHILDHOOD OBESITY

OUNB girls are more likely to be obese, according to a new study published by the HSE in conjunction with the National Nutrition Surveillance Centre in UCD. The Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI) in the Republic of Ireland shows that levels of excess weight in children are stabilising, they also indicate that: • at least one in five children are overweight or obese; • more girls than boys are overweight or obese across all ages; and • those attending DEIS schools tend to have higher levels of overweight and obesity and the gap becomes wider as children get older.

Launching the report Minister Corcoran-Kennedy, Minister of State for Health Promotion commented: “I’d like to acknowledge and thank the children and their parents who consented to participate and provide growth measurements as well as the individual schools and Department of Education who facilitate the researchers in collecting the data. Their support and involvement in research initiatives such as this is so important and valuable. The Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative is a core tool to help us monitor our progress towards achieving the targets set out in The Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2018-2025.”

The plan sets a short-term target for a sustained downward trend in levels of excess weight in children and a reduction in the gap in obesity levels between the highest and lowest socio-economic groups by 10pc. The unfortunate truth is that we are on course to become the most obese nation in Europe, unless we take action now. Tackling childhood obesity is a key priority for me as Minister.”

The report provides a picture of the height, weight and BMI in primary school-aged children in Ireland currently as well as the trends over time since 2008. It will be repeated at intervals over the lifetime of the policy and will provide valuable information to policymakers and practitioners.

Sarah Ó Brien, HSE National Lead for the Healthy Eating, Active Living Programme commented: “While it is positive that the levels of excess weight in children appears to be levelling off over time, it remains at quite a high level – with at least one in five children carrying excess weight that will damage their health both now and into the future. “The findings indicate that we still have a significant way to go to create environments in our homes, schools and communities where every child has the potential to grow and develop healthily from birth into adulthood.”

The trend showing the most change is in girls and a reduction in the gap in obesity levels between the highest and lowest socio-economic groups. Some key trends have emerged including:

• measured in 4th class (aged 9-10) is 20.2pc, with the prevalence in girls at 24.8pc and boys at 14.5pc.
• measured in 6th class (aged 11-12) is 20.6pc, with the prevalence in girls at 23.9pc and boys at 18.4pc.

The National Nutrition Surveillance Centre presented the findings at the Association for the Study of Obesity on the Island Ireland (ASOI) annual conference. “We now have over seventeen thousand examinations from children over four rounds, carried out in the same schools,” said Professor Cecily Kelleher, Director of the National Nutrition Surveillance Centr. She added. “These findings highlight the need to address the gap between better off and less advantaged children and to focus on interventions that appeal to both girls and boys.”

SLIGO UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL LAUNCHES CALORIE POSTING POLICY

SLUH University Hospital (SLUH) have officially launched their Calorie Posting Policy to promote awareness and increase consumption of healthier food and drink choices among HSE staff and the public using and visiting HSE healthcare facilities. As part of the HSE’s Healthy Ireland Policy, SLUH University Hospital began rolling out the HSE Calorie Posting Policy back in October 2015 and introduced a 6 Phase Plan to complete this process for all hot and cold food items and beverages in the staff canteen/coffee dock. By December 2015 phase 1 was implemented which outlined the calorie content for all breakfast items displayed and by the end of 2016 all phases of the project were implemented.

The development and implementation of a Calorie Posting Policy is an important initiative supporting the key policy priority programmes – Healthy Eating and Active Living, and Staff Health and Wellbeing. The purpose of this Policy is to promote awareness and increase consumption of healthier food and drink choices by highlighting the calorie content of food and drinks provided in HSE facilities.

Commenting on the success and eagerness of the staff at Sligo University Hospital in implementing the HSE policy on calorie posting, Graeme McClarn, General Manager, said: “Calorie Posting is a key element of the HSE’s Healthy Ireland Policy. Research suggests that when menus display calories, people eat 840 calories less per day. Calorie posting focuses on displaying calories at the point of choice on food and beverages. It recognises that putting calories on menus makes the healthier choice the easier choice. This policy will make our staff and visitors more aware of the calories in the food they eat and provide information regarding healthy eating options which in turn leads to healthier lifestyles.”

KEY FINDINGS

4,909 children across 138 schools participated in the survey. Since the first survey was conducted in 2008, it has been repeated three times giving researchers access to 17,145 examinations to analyse and monitor trends in healthy weight, overweight and obesity in primary school-aged children in Ireland. Over the four rounds of the surveillance (2008-2015) some key trends have emerged including:

• the levels of overweight and obesity in 1st class children (age 6-7 years) and those aged 8-12 years appear to be stabilising though not in those children attending DEIS schools; and there is a marked difference across genders with more girls tending to be overweight or obese than boys.

International evidence points to a higher level of overweight and obesity in children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The trends emerging from the surveillance in Ireland reveal a similar pattern.

When data from children attending DEIS schools is compared with that of children attending other schools, those attending DEIS schools tend to have higher levels of overweight and obesity and the gap becomes wider as children get older. 21.7pc in First Class • 30.8pc in Fourth Class • 52.2pc in Sixth Class

The 2015 results show that according to the International Taskforce on Childhood Obesity, the current combined prevalence of overweight and obesity in Irish children:

• measured in 1st class (aged 6-7) is 16.9pc, with the prevalence in girls at 20.4pc and boys at 13.2pc.
• measured in 4th class (aged 9-10) is 20.2pc, with the prevalence in girls at 24.8pc and boys at 14.5pc.
• measured in 6th class (aged 11-12) is 20.6pc, with the prevalence in girls at 23.9pc and boys at 18.4pc.

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