

National Child Measurement Programme

Briefing for elected members



Introduction

These frequently asked questions (FAQs) for elected members have been produced by the Local Government Association and Public Health England. They address a number of transitional issues relating to the transfer of responsibility for delivering the National Child Measurement Programme to local government.

What is the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP)?

The NCMP involves the annual measurement of the height and weight of children in reception year and Year 6, and the return of the data to the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC).

The programme has two key purposes:

1. **to provide robust public health surveillance data on child weight status**, to understand obesity prevalence and trends at local and national levels, to inform obesity planning and commissioning and underpin the Public Health Outcomes Framework indicator on excess weight in 4-5 and 10-11 year olds
2. **to provide parents with feedback on their child's weight status**: to help them understand their child's health status, support and encourage behaviour change and provide a mechanism for direct engagement with families with overweight, underweight and obese children.

Is delivery of the NCMP one of the statutory public health duties that will transition to local authorities?

Yes. **Local authorities took on a duty for local delivery of the NCMP from 1 April 2013**, part way through an annual collection. Because the programme has been operated by PCTs for a number of years, an experienced NCMP delivery infrastructure is already in place within local public health teams. As a mandated public health programme, provision to resource the delivery of the NCMP is made through the ring fenced public health grant for local authorities. Nationally the programme will be overseen by Public Health England at a national level.

What does delivering the NCMP involve?

The duty on local authorities requires that:

- the programme is overseen by a health care professional, such as a registered nurse or dietitian
- the height and weight of eligible children in Reception and Year 6 children attending schools in the locality are measured annually
- data collected through the NCMP are returned to the Health and Social Care Information Centre
- in delivering the programme, local authorities have regard to the annual operational guidance.

Which schools does the delivery of the NCMP apply to?

Every state-maintained primary and middle school, including academy and free schools, should be included in the NCMP and are included in the calculated participation rates. As in previous years when the programme was run by PCTs, local authority teams commissioning NCMP, and those providing the NCMP locally will need to work with schools to secure their participation in the programme.

Does the NCMP apply to home-educated children, and children being educated in settings other than state-maintained schools?

Children educated in these settings are not included in the participation rates calculated for local authorities, it is down to local determination to decide whether measurements are undertaken for children attending other education settings, such as independent schools, pupil referral units, or being educated at home.

Who will feed back the results to parents?

The approach for sharing results with parents is determined on a locally led basis – whether on a routine, or request only basis. To date, the vast majority of PCTs have shared results with parents routinely, and the others have done so on a request-only basis.

National evaluation and research have consistently shown that parents want to receive their child's result, and that sharing a child's weight status with their parent is an effective mechanism for raising awareness of the potential associated health consequences. It also gives parents the opportunity to seek advice and support if they want it.

What can elected members do to help?

Evidence strongly shows that parents and even health care professionals are poor at judging usually whether a child is a healthy weight. Elected members can help by raising awareness of child obesity and childhood malnourishment, and by raising the importance of assessing with an objective measurement, as the NCMP does, rather than assuming it is possible to judge by eye.

Elected members can also help children and parents who are concerned about their results, whether the child is obese or underweight, by being aware of the leisure and weight management initiatives that are available locally, and signposting to and encouraging participation in those activities.

Are the data reliable?

With over 99 per cent of schools and 93 per cent of eligible children participating in the NCMP across England, the data produced are recognised as being extremely robust and reliable at national and local level.

What is NCMP data used for?

NCMP data provides robust local intelligence on child obesity prevalence and trends, to inform the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and underpin obesity planning and commissioning decisions. The data will underpin the Public Health Outcomes Framework indicator on excess weight in 4-5 and 10-11 year. Additionally, in most areas, data is shared directly with the parents of the children who participated. This acts as a means of direct engagement with these families.

Why is child obesity important to this age group?

Recent findings from the HSCIC report on obesity trends showed that:

- Child obesity is a critical public health issue, putting children at greater risk of developing cancer, type 2 diabetes and heart disease in later life. Other risks include early puberty, developing eating disorders, asthma, teasing and discrimination by peers, low self-esteem, anxiety and depression.
- About one in five children in reception (aged 4–5 years) are overweight or obese, rising to one in three in year 6 (10–11 year olds).
- Prevalence rates remain stubbornly high (among the highest in Europe), with prevalence doubling in almost all local authorities between the first and the last years of primary school.

Why should local authorities support it?

The delivery of the surveillance aspects of the NCMP is now a statutory duty of local authorities. Local government is uniquely well placed to bring together the broad coalition of partners required to tackle obesity. Data from the NCMP will be used to monitor the Public Health Outcomes Framework indicator on excess weight in children.

The Government's 'Healthy Lives, Healthy People: A call to action on obesity in England', which was published in October 2011, sets a new ambition for a downward trend in excess weight for children and adults by 2020. This ambition will be monitored using NCMP data.

Is there a role for scrutiny?

Through scrutiny, councillors in upper tier and unitary councils have powers to hold health and wellbeing boards, clinical commissioning groups, directors of public health, health and social care providers to account for their decisions and actions.

What are the top five questions I need to ask?

1. What weight management services are available to children, young people and families in my local authority?
2. Have the findings from NCMP data been reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board to inform strategic decisions?
3. Is there a multi-agency partnership programme of work in place which addresses both child malnourishment and obesity?
4. Are the results from NCMP data informing the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and underpinning planning and commissioning decisions for children who are overweight, obese and underweight?
5. Is my local authority working in partnership with schools and nurseries to address issues relating to both child malnourishment and obesity by promoting healthy eating plans and active lifestyles?



Where can I find out more?

Further information on obesity and the NCMP is available from your local public health team and the following sources:

- The Department of Health website contains useful information on obesity including the annual operational guidance for the NCMP: <http://tinyurl.com/casp2jf>
- Information about Public Health England: <http://tinyurl.com/cygust3>
- The Obesity and Intelligence Team within Public Health England provides information and evidence on obesity for policy makers and practitioners, including a local authority and ward-level mapping tool: www.noo.org.uk
- The Obesity Learning Centre provides quality assured information for everyone working in obesity: <http://www.obesitylearningcentre.org.uk/>
- The Health and Social Care Information Centre publishes data on child obesity from the NCMP: www.hscic.gov.uk/ncmp
- The Change4life website is a source of information for the public on how to eat well, move more and live longer: www.nhs.uk/Change4Life
- Local Government Association public health resource sheet to help councils tackle obesity: <http://tinyurl.com/btpeb5o>
- NICE guidance to support effective, sustainable and community-wide action to tackle obesity: <http://guidance.nice.org.uk/PH42>
- Public Health Outcomes Framework Indicators on Excess weight in 4-5 and 10-11 year olds: <http://tinyurl.com/bnuxk7s>
- Centre for Public Scrutiny
For information about scrutiny of health and social care issues
www.cfps.org.uk





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