



**HEALTHY WEIGHT, HEALTHY LIVES:
NATIONAL CHILD MEASUREMENT
PROGRAMME GUIDANCE FOR
SCHOOLS 2010/11**

This guidance sets out information for primary and middle schools on the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP). It explains the purpose of the programme and what schools can do to support the programme. It also provides details of additional material, which might be helpful for explaining the NCMP to children and parents/carers.

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1. Summary and background

- 1.1 The Government's *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives* strategy has made a real difference in pulling together activity across all parts of society to support us all in reaching a healthy weight. Action can be seen by individuals and families joining in with Change4Life, nutrition and physical activity initiatives in schools, as well as action from health professionals supporting patients who want to lose weight for their health.
- 1.2 We committed to reduce the proportion of overweight and obese children to 2000 levels by 2020 and the latest data from the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) and Health Survey for England show that the rapid rise in children obesity is levelling off, thanks to the hard work of families, schools, businesses and the NHS across England, supported by the Government.
- 1.3 But we mustn't become complacent if we are to realise our ambition to enable everyone in society to achieve and maintain a healthy weight. The NCMP is an important part of the Government's *Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives* strategy. Every year children in Reception Year and Year 6 are weighed and measured during the school year as part of the NCMP and this action is part of the Healthy Child Programme from 5 to 19 years old.
- 1.4 All schools have a duty to promote their pupils' wellbeing, part of which is promoting a healthy lifestyle. The NCMP is a vital part of local and national health planning and, without schools' support; this very important information will not be available. We therefore strongly encourage schools to take part.
- 1.5 The programme will shortly begin its sixth year and is becoming well established, with 90% of eligible children participating in 2008/09, the last complete year of operation. We would like to thank all schools, organisations and staff who have worked hard on the programme to achieve this.
- 1.6 NHS Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) are responsible for the programme and carry out most of the work, but we need schools to support the programme by:
 - informing parents and carers about the NCMP by sending a letter developed by the PCT in pupil post (see the specimen letter at Annex 1);
 - explaining the NCMP to pupils, with the help of resources developed centrally;
 - providing class lists with school name and unique reference number, pupil names, sex, dates of birth, ethnicity codes and home postcode – and home address if results are to be sent to parents. In some areas where the local authority holds up-to-date information, it may be able to provide PCTs with this data. However, where the local authority does not hold up-to-date class lists, the PCT will request their information from the school; and
 - identifying a suitable location in which the measurements can be taken.

2. The importance of a healthy weight

1.7 The way we live in modern society means that it is harder to be a healthy weight. We are less active and do not eat as healthily as we used to. Being overweight or obese can have a severe impact on an individual's physical health – both are associated with an increased risk of type 2 diabetes, cancer, and heart and liver disease. These illnesses put pressure on families and society more broadly and, without action, the cost to society is forecast to reach £50 billion per year by 2050. Overweight children could also be affected by social issues such as:

- teasing or bullying;
- behavioural problems stemming from anxiety or depression;
- avoidance of active play or learning opportunities in school sport and physical education (PE); and
- missing school for medical appointments or treatment.

1.8 Many schools are already working with a range of partners to deliver programmes that can help establish and support healthy lifestyles in children. These include:

- participating in the National Healthy Schools Programme, which promotes healthy eating and physical activity, among other things;
- delivering high-quality PE which ensures that pupils are aware of what is required to lead an active, healthy lifestyle and provides them with the skills, knowledge, confidence and enthusiasm to do so;
- providing healthy and nutritious school food, which helps pupils develop healthier eating patterns/habits;
- raising pupils' awareness of the need for good nutrition through other subject areas such as science and personal, social and health education (PSHE);
- building pupil skills and understanding of good nutrition through cookery classes;
- providing a range of health and wellbeing-related activities for children and their families through access to extended services;
- developing young people's confidence, sense of self-esteem and wellbeing through activities and structures that give children a voice;
- delivering a wide range of sports and physical activities that enable young people to take part in activities outside the curriculum;
- directing pupils to additional and alternative community-based opportunities to be physically active including local play provision; and
- developing active school travel plans that encourage walking and cycling.

- 1.9 The new Pupil Guarantee will entitle all children to attend a school that encourages healthy lifestyles, including healthy food and an offer of five hours of sport a week, inside or outside the school day. In September 2009, an enhanced Healthy Schools Programme was launched to support those that have already achieved Healthy Schools status to do more in promoting positive health outcomes for their pupils.
- 1.10 The NCMP has a crucial role to play in engaging parents and carers and helping them to make lifestyle changes that can help their child to achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Schools may therefore want to use the NCMP as a tool to help engage both children and their parents/carers in activities and programmes that support a healthy lifestyle.
- 1.11 Parents and carers who have received their child's results will generally be interested in finding out more, and the results letter will provide contact details of their local NHS. However, it may also be helpful to schedule activities and events for children and families to coincide with the NCMP measurement exercise or the feedback process. For example, some areas arrange healthy lifestyle initiatives after school around the same time that the letters are sent out, and a representative from the NHS NCMP team is available there to respond to queries from parents and carers. Another example would be to encourage school cooks to put on food taster sessions for parents – fussy eaters will often change their food likes and dislikes when eating with their peers at school.

3. Routine feedback to parents and carers and follow-up advice and support

- 1.12 Since 2008/09, PCTs have been encouraged to routinely send all parents and carers the results of their child's height and weight measurement (known as routine feedback). In previous years, parents and carers received their child's results only if they requested them. It is for each PCT to decide whether to introduce routine feedback, depending on whether they have all the necessary services in place to support follow-up enquiries from parents and carers receiving results.
- 1.13 Where the PCT is not routinely feeding back, parents and carers will have one month after the measurements are taken in which to request their child's results. Parents and carers will still have the opportunity to withdraw their child from the programme and children can decide not to participate on the day.
- 1.14 PCTs are responsible for sending the feedback letters to parents and carers. PCTs will ask schools to supply each child's home address to allow the results to be sent to the child's parents or carers.
- 1.15 The format and language of the feedback letter and accompanying leaflet have been developed in conjunction with parents and carers. In addition to the raw height and weight, the letter provides an interpretation of whether the results suggest that the child is a healthy weight, underweight, overweight or very overweight. Parents and carers will also receive information on how they can maintain a healthy lifestyle and contact details of their local NHS for further information and advice.
- 1.16 PCTs may proactively follow up with parents of underweight, overweight or obese children, to offer them and their families specific help and advice where necessary.

4. Planning for the programme in your school

Which schools should participate in the NCMP?

- 1.17 Every maintained primary and middle school will be asked to participate in the NCMP. Independent schools are not included in the overall PCT participation target for the NCMP, but the measurement of children in these schools is encouraged whenever possible. Independent or special schools that have not previously participated in the NCMP but would like to do so should contact their PCT.
- 1.18 Children who are physically unable to stand unaided on weighing scales and height measures are legally exempt from participation, and schools will be asked to help PCTs by identifying these children. Any services offered by schools which are aimed at promoting healthy weight through good nutrition and physical exercise should be offered to all children, regardless of whether they have taken part or will take part in the NCMP.

Liaison with your PCT

- 1.19 PCTs will contact schools during the 2010/11 academic year to arrange a convenient time to come into the school to weigh and measure the relevant year groups. If there is a particular time at which schools would prefer the measurements to take place, they should contact their PCT at the earliest opportunity to discuss this.
- 1.20 PCTs find it very useful to have a named contact within the school to confirm details and make the necessary arrangements. PCTs should work with schools to ensure that the weighing and measuring can take place with as little disruption as possible.

Informing parents or carers

- 1.21 The NCMP is operated on an opt-out basis, so parents and carers will be sent a letter (pre-measurement letter – see Annex 1 for a specimen) informing them that the programme is taking place in their child's school and giving them a chance to withdraw their child if they wish to.
- 1.22 PCTs will want to agree with schools whether they will send out the pre-measurement letters to inform parents and carers about the measurement exercise via pupil post. Parents are the main influence on their children's lifestyles and it is important that they are fully informed and engaged in the process, and are given the choice as to whether or not their child participates.
- 1.23 The letter should be sent out sufficiently far in advance of the exercise to give parents and carers a fair opportunity to decide whether to withdraw their child from the exercise, and should include the leaflet Why your child's weight matters.
- 1.24 Schools will be asked to identify children who are unable to participate in the programme for a specific reason, such as a physical disability or injury that means they are unable to stand. A letter is available from the PCT which, if appropriate, can be sent to the parents or carers of these children, offering the opportunity for their child to be weighed and measured in an alternative setting.

1.25 If PCTs are not routinely feeding the results back, parents will be able to request their child's height and weight from their PCT up to one month after the weighing and measuring takes place.

Providing class lists

1.26 Schools may need to provide PCT staff with class lists containing the school name and unique reference number, pupil names, sex, dates of birth, ethnicity codes, home postcodes and home addresses when results are to be sent to parents for all pupils in Reception Year and Year 6. The names of children who have been withdrawn from the programme by their parents should also be recorded and provided to the PCT. The local NHS will store identifiable NCMP data for each child to allow feedback of results to parents and carers and proactive follow-up if necessary. However, data is changed before being uploaded to the main NCMP database (pupil names are removed, dates of birth are changed to months of birth and postcodes are converted to lower-layer super output areas) so that individual children cannot be identified from the results at a national level.

Suitable location

1.27 It is important that each child is weighed and measured in privacy without being seen or heard by other pupils. Schools will, therefore, need to identify a private area with adequate space and appropriate flooring (i.e. level, non-carpeted flooring to ensure that scales give an accurate reading) in which measurements can be taken. If a separate room is not available, a screened-off area should be provided.

Explaining the NCMP to pupils

1.28 Some pupils may be worried about being weighed and measured. It is important that these anxieties are managed and that pupils understand what will be involved. A children's flyer and poster is available for Year 6 pupils to help them understand the process. See section 8 of this guidance for further details.

1.29 As most schools will have achieved, or will be working towards achieving, Healthy Schools status, it might be useful to include discussion of the NCMP within wider health education or PSHE. Alternatively, schools might want to consider arranging for the school nurse or other appropriate staff to explain the programme to pupils before the measurement session and link this to the importance of health, nutrition and physical activity in maintaining a healthy weight.

1.30 In particular, it will be important to explain:

- that they will be weighed and measured in a way that ensures that their classmates will not be able to see or hear;
- that they will remain fully clothed and will be asked to remove only their shoes and coats;
- why their year group is being weighed and measured; and

- that the results are confidential and will only be sent to their parents/carers and used within the local NHS to inform delivery of services for children and to proactively follow up on the child if necessary. Individual identifiable results will not be shared in schools or beyond the local NHS.

Consent

1.31 Explicit consent from parents or carers is not needed for children to be weighed and measured for the NCMP because:

- with schools' assistance, parents and carers will receive a letter explaining the purpose of the programme (Annex 1), which provides them with the opportunity to withdraw their child from it;
- the privacy and dignity of the child will be safeguarded and the measurement will be done sensitively in a private setting;
- the information is gathered under the supervision of health professionals; and
- the collection and processing of information is governed by legal provisions in regulations under the NHS Act 2006.

5. Preparation for the measurement session

Facilitation and participation

1.32 All children in Reception Year and Year 6 are expected to participate, except those who:

- have been withdrawn by their parents or carers;
- do not want to participate on the day (although reasonable attempts should be made to address pupils' concerns, they should not be forced to participate); and
- are not able to stand unaided on the scales or under the height measure, for example due to physical disability or injury (for whom alternative arrangements, might be available from the PCT).

1.33 Schools will need to supervise the movement of children to and from the measuring area.

Weighing and measuring

1.34 The exercise will be conducted in a discreet and sensitive way, maintaining pupils' privacy to prevent possible stigmatisation. The programme will be overseen by a trained health professional, and those undertaking the weighing and measuring will be trained and will have Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau clearance. PCT staff will bring all the necessary equipment for weighing and measuring, including an approved set of weighing scales and an approved portable height measure.

The data

1.35 All the information gathered by the NCMP is treated confidentially. Pupils will not be informed of their results and individual children's results must not be given to school staff. Although aggregated data should be shared with the school to help inform their understanding of the prevalence of overweight and obesity in the school.

1.36 Identifiable information is held by the NHS at local level. All identifiable fields are removed or encrypted before the data is sent to the NCMP database for national collation and analysis.

1.37 School-level data will not be published in the national NCMP report produced by the NHS Information Centre, nor will it be sent to any other central organisations or government departments. However, the anonymised dataset will be made available to Public Health Observatories to enable them to undertake regional-level and local-level analysis to inform delivery of services.

6. Feedback of results to schools

- 1.38 Schools can request feedback on the results of the programme for their school from the PCT. It is important to be aware that schools will not receive raw data. This is because small numbers of children in the school mean that school-level analysis of obesity prevalence is unreliable. There is also a risk that individual children may be identified, especially where data is broken down by sex or ethnicity.
- 1.39 Schools will usually receive school-level feedback that shows how the prevalence of overweight and obesity compares with their local or regional average – for example, whether the prevalence of obesity at the school is higher than or lower than the local or regional average.
- 1.40 This approach maintains the confidentiality of individual children's results and ensures that any actions relating to differences between schools are based on statistically valid comparisons.
- 1.41 If PCTs or schools receive requests for school-level data under the Freedom of Information Act, the format outlined above should be used to ensure that there is no risk of identification of individual children.
- 1.42 After receiving school-level results, schools might wish to have discussions with their PCTs regarding additional services that could be offered in their schools to support the health and wellbeing of pupils.

7. Resources

- 1.43 Details of how to order or download the resources that are available to support the NCMP, including the children's flyer and the Why your child's weight matters leaflet, can be found at: www.dh.gov.uk/healthyliving .
- 1.44 The Government's Change4Life campaign aims to help families to eat well, move more and live longer. It provides resources, ideas and events that focus on eight key messages for children around eating well and being active. Schools and other organisations are able to access branding and toolkits to help promote these messages to pupils and parents/carers. Visit www.nhs.uk/change4life to register as a partner.

Annex 1: Specimen letter to parents and carers

This letter may be provided by PCTs to be sent via the school pupil post to all parents and carers of children eligible for inclusion in the NCMP 2010/11.

PCTs may make minor changes to the letter to suit local needs; however, the wording shown in bold in the letter should be followed closely, because this sets out the legal requirements for the programme and the intended use of the data, of which we must make due effort to inform parents and carers of.

We recommend that a copy of the leaflet for parents and carers, *Why your child's weight matters*, is enclosed when schools send out this letter.

This version of the letter is for PCTs that are routinely sending results to parents.

PCTs will use a slightly different letter if they are providing feedback on request only.

Measuring the height and weight of children in reception year and year 6

The NHS needs to have a good understanding of how children across the country are growing so that the best possible health services can be provided for them. As a result, every year all children in England in reception year and year 6 have their height and weight checked. This important programme is now in its sixth year.

Your child's class will take part in this year's measurement programme. There are a number of things that we would like you to know.

The measurement will be supervised by trained staff from your local NHS primary care trust (PCT). The measurements will be done in a private area away from other pupils. Children who take part will be asked to remove their shoes and coats and will be weighed in normal indoor clothing. Any cultural needs of the child will be respected.

Routine data, such as your child's name, sex, address, postcode, ethnicity and date of birth, will also be collected. This information will then be used within the PCT to help us understand how children in your area are growing and to plan help for children who have weight-related problems.

The records of children's heights and weights will be made anonymous before being submitted for analysis at a national level, but may be stored locally on PCT child health records so that parents and carers can be given the results and any follow-up advice.

All information and results will be treated confidentially. No child's height or weight will be given to school staff or other children.

Once your child has had their height and weight checked, your local NHS will send you your child's results through the post. **[NOTE: PCTs to add if proactively following-up children: You may also receive a follow-up phone call from your local NHS.]**

A leaflet called 'Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: Why your child's weight matters' is enclosed to provide more information about the National Child Measurement Programme and tips on healthy eating and being active.

Opting your child out of the programme

If you are happy for your child to be weighed and measured, you do not need to do anything. **If you do not want your child to take part, please let your local NHS know by writing to or telephoning them using the contact details at the top of this letter. Children will not be made to participate if they do not want to.**

Yours faithfully

[Insert name] [Insert name]

Director of Public Health Director of Children's Services

[Insert name of PCT]

