



The National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) Frequently Asked Questions

Through the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP), the height and weight of primary school children in reception (4 to 5 years old) and year 6 (aged 10 to 11 years old) is measured by a trained health professional. Your child does not have to take part in the programme, but it's important that as many children are involved as possible since the NCMP provides data about obesity levels in children which is used to inform decisions about local and national public health initiatives and the provision of services.

Here are answers to some of the questions and comments that parents and carers often have about NCMP.

Q. I've heard that using Body Mass Index (BMI) to assess weight is not very accurate, especially in children. If that's the case, why do you use it?

BMI is an indirect measure of body fat. It has been assessed against more direct measures of body fat, such as MRI scanning and has been found to be the most accurate and accessible method currently available for assessing weight in children. There are always limitations to the accuracy of medical tests, and these need to be taken into account when interpreting results. Both national and international bodies such as the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommend the use of BMI centiles as a tool to assess weight in children. If you would like help interpreting your child's result, you can talk to your public health nurse (school nurse) or GP.

Q. You've told me my child is overweight and I disagree with you. What should I do?

There are some limitations to using BMI centiles to assess weight in children as discussed above. However, in the majority of situations, the result is accurate. If the BMI centile suggests your child is overweight and you disagree with this assessment, then it is probably best to consult your school nurse or GP as a first step. They can review the measurements, put these in the context of other aspects of your child's health and wellbeing and advise you accordingly.

Q. You haven't told me what the healthy weight range for my child is. How can I find out this out?

We don't provide a healthy weight range in the results letter as this would become incorrect as soon as your child grows taller. The best way to find the healthy weight range for your child is to enter their current measurements into a BMI tool such as www.nhs.uk/bmi, and then adjust the weight until the result falls within the healthy

weight category. You could continue to use this method as your child grows taller, as the healthy weight range for them will change as they grow.

Q. My child is really tall for their age and you've told me they're overweight. Aren't they just 'in proportion' rather than being overweight?

Children can be tall and overweight, even if they are in proportion. Using BMI centiles takes both height and weight into account and is still an accurate indicator that a child is carrying excess weight, even for tall children.

Q. Doesn't this weighing and measuring process risk causing eating disorders in children?

The NCMP has been carefully monitored since it began, and there is no evidence that it has resulted in an increase in eating disorders in young people. We understand weight can be a sensitive issue, and every effort is made to carry out the process sensitively. We listen to feedback from parents and schools and use this to continually improve the way the programme is delivered. The risk of causing anxiety about weight has to be balanced against the risk to our children of the current rates of being overweight and obesity. The NCMP is one way we can start to tackle unhealthy weight in our children.

Q. Telling me my child is overweight or very overweight makes me feel like you are judging or criticising me as a parent.

Being told your child is overweight can be an upsetting experience, but it certainly does not imply your parenting is at fault. Our modern lifestyles make it difficult to maintain a healthy weight but this doesn't mean there is nothing we can do. We feel it is important to share your child's result with you so you can act on the information if necessary and so we can provide help and support where this is needed.

Q. Should I talk to my child about his/her result?

This is a personal decision. We don't think you should automatically share your child's result with them, which is why the result comes direct to you at your home address rather than via your child. Older children, who may be more involved in any lifestyle changes you may be considering may already know there is an issue and might feel relieved to have an honest and positive discussion with you about it. Or you may feel your child is already very sensitive about their weight and sharing this result could be more negative than positive. Younger children may be less able to understand, and it might be simpler to make lifestyle changes without a direct discussion with them. Weight Concern provide more in depth advice about talking to your child about their weight at www.weightconcern.org.uk

If you have any further questions or concerns, do contact your public health nurse (school nurse) or GP.

