



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 ask your health professional.

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. 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 out what a healthy weight would be for your child is to enter their current measurements into a BMI tool such as www.nhs.uk/bmi then adjust the weight until the result falls in the healthy

weight category. You could continue to use this method as your child grows taller, as what is a healthy weight 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 of when a child is carrying excess weight, even in 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 as yet that there has been an increase in eating disorders in young people as a result. 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 sensitivity about weight has to be balanced against the risk to our children of the current rates of 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 can 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 it 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

Q. I have weighed and measured my child at home and I do not agree with the results you have provided – what should I do?

There are a number of reasons that there may be a difference in measurements; your child may have grown in the time period between measurement to you receiving the letter, and weight can also fluctuate. A difference in clothing and equipment will also give a difference in measurements. If there is more than 2kg difference in

weight measurements, or you are concerned, please contact us on the number on your letter.

Q. You have told me my child is overweight, but he/she does regular exercise and eats a healthy diet, so is there anything more I can do?

It is positive that your child is undertaking regular exercise and eating a healthy diet. The recommendations are that children do 60 minutes of physical activity each day. It would also be beneficial to review the portion sizes given to your child. More information can be found at www.changeforlife.co.uk. If you are concerned and would like to discuss with a member of the Healthy Together team, your school nurse details can be found by searching your child's school on www.healthforkids.co.uk

Q. I have been told my child is underweight, what should I do?

As outlined in the results letter, if you are concerned about your child being underweight, please contact your GP initially to rule out any medical reasons for this and for further advice.

Q. The results do not take into account the fact that my child is 'large boned' or has a 'large frame'?

If your child is tall, and above the 91st centile, and their weight is also on the same centile, then their BMI results will be high. In these circumstances your child's weight would not be a concern. However, if you are worried, you can discuss with a member of the Healthy Together team. Call the NCMP team on 0300 3000 007 (select option 1 twice) who will be able to put you in touch with a practitioner.

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

