

Overweight and Obesity Summary (JSNA-on-a-page)

Created by: The Public Health Evidence & Intelligence Team

Key Points:

- Obesity is defined as 'abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that presents a risk to health'.
- In England, 20% of year 6 children have obesity and two-thirds of adults are overweight or obese.
- Being overweight/obese is associated with type 2 diabetes, some cancers & cardiovascular disease.
- Preventing and treating obesity requires a 'whole systems' approach across the life course because the causes of obesity are multifactorial and complex.

Key causes and risk factors for obesity

- **Biological factors** - Endocrine disorders, genetic syndromes and medications can result in weight gain. In England, excess weight prevalence (overweight and obesity combined) is higher in males than females across the life course.
- **Obesogenic environment** - Factors such as lack of safety, access and knowledge, alongside food marketing and high fast-food density can impact physical activity and diet and promote obesity.
- **Social and economic factors** - In England, compared to other ethnic groups, Black adults have the highest prevalence of excess weight and Black children have the highest obesity prevalence. There is a strong correlation between deprivation and obesity with those in the most deprived quintile having the highest obesity prevalence.
- **Diet and activity** - Having energy-dense foods, sugar-sweetened beverages and a low-fibre diet may promote weight gain. Although exercise alone may have minimal effect on weight loss, exercise in itself provides health benefits in those who are overweight/obese. Breastfeeding is promoted to help prevent obesity.

What the statistics show

- In Hertfordshire in 2019-20, 6 in 10 adults were overweight/obese and this was lower than England. Stevenage had a higher % of adults who were overweight/obese than the % in Hertfordshire.
- In the same year, 20% of Reception and 30% of Year 6 children in Hertfordshire were overweight/obese and this was lower than the proportion in England. A greater proportion of Black students in Reception and Year 6 had overweight/obesity compared to the Hertfordshire average.
- Deprivation was strongly linked to obesity prevalence in Reception and Year 6 in Hertfordshire.
- In Year 6 Hertfordshire students, overweight & obesity combined was higher in boys than girls.
- Breastfeeding initiation is lower in Dacorum, Watford and Stevenage than the Herts average.
- The COVID-19 pandemic affected weight management service and physical activity initiative delivery as well as evaluation of these programmes.
- Transport, affordability, crime, places to go and places to eat were identified as factors affecting obesity by children and young people in Hertfordshire.

Recommendations

- Follow a whole systems obesity approach using the 10 pillars of action & make every contact count.
- Continue to target and increase obesity prevention and management programmes, particularly in deprived areas, men and specific ethnic groups such as the Black population.
- Create a referral pathway that clearly links tier 1 and 2 weight management services to tiers 3 and 4.
- Increase understanding of the service outcomes of weight management services, particularly at tiers 3 and 4 and by looking at long-term outcomes.
- Increase awareness of service provision by updating the Health in Herts 'Healthy weight' page, campaigning and continuing to liaise with schools, Herts Sports Partnership and other service providers.