

Four-fold rise in children treated for obesity-related conditions

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The number of children admitted to hospital for problems related to obesity in England and Wales quadrupled between 2000 and 2009, a study has found.

Nearly three quarters of these admissions were to deal with problems complicated by obesity such as asthma, [breathing difficulties](#) during sleep, and complications of pregnancy, rather than obesity itself being the primary reason.

Researchers at Imperial College London looked at NHS statistics for children and young people aged five to 19 where obesity was recorded in the diagnosis.

In 2009 there were 3,806 children admitted to hospital for obesity-related conditions, compared with 872 in 2000. Teenage girls accounted for the biggest rises in obesity-related [hospital admissions](#). In 2009, 198 teenage girls experienced complications of pregnancy where obesity was thought to be a factor.

The number of bariatric surgery procedures in children and young people also rose from one per year in 2000 to 31 in 2009. Three quarters of these were in [teenage girls](#). The findings are published in the open access journal *PLOS ONE*.

"The burden of obesity is usually thought to have its serious consequences in adulthood, but we now see it manifesting earlier, in childhood," said Dr Sonia Saxena, from the School of Public Health at Imperial, who led the study. "It's clear that rising obesity levels are causing more [medical problems](#) in children, but the rise we observed probably also reflects increasing awareness among [clinicians](#), who have become better at recognising obesity."

National surveys in England suggest that around 30 per cent of children aged two to 15 are overweight and 14 to 20 per cent are obese. Children who are obese have a higher risk of

health problems such as [type 2 diabetes](#), asthma, and sleep apnoea.

Previous work by the Imperial team and the University of Southern Carolina found that adults in the US are six to eight times more likely to perceive they are overweight or obese if told by a doctor and five times more likely to try to do something about it. But only 45 per cent of overweight patients who visit a doctor recall having been told about their weight problem.

"It's important that doctors speak to patients about their weight, because any attempt to help their patients must begin by recognising the problem."

More information: 1. J.D. Jones Nielsen et al. 'Rising obesity-related hospital admissions among children and young people in England: National time trends study' *PLOS ONE* (2013).

2. The earlier study referred to is: R.E. Post et al. 'The Influence of Physician Acknowledgment of Patients' Weight Status on Patient Perceptions of Overweight and Obesity in the United States' *Arch Intern Med.* 2011;171(4):316-321. [doi:10.1001/archinternmed.2010.549](https://doi.org/10.1001/archinternmed.2010.549)

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