

Obese preschoolers have 60 percent higher healthcare costs than healthy weight children

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Obese children aged two to five years old are 2-3 times more likely to be admitted to hospital and have 60 per cent higher healthcare costs than healthy weight children, a study by the University of Sydney's School of Public Health has found.

Published today in *Obesity* journal, this is the first study to reveal the higher direct [health care costs](#) of obesity in preschool aged children compared with those of normal weight.

The study examined the health care use of 350 children including all doctor and specialist visits, medical tests, diagnostics, medicines, hospital admissions and emergency presentations.

Compared with healthy weight children, [obese children](#) had 60 per cent higher total [healthcare costs](#), and were two to three times more likely to be admitted to hospital - particularly for respiratory disorders and diseases of the ear, nose, mouth and throat.

"Childhood obesity is a serious [public health](#) issue, and is becoming an increasing problem in children under five years old," said lead researcher Alison Hayes, Associate Professor of Health Economics at the University.

"In addition to the health impacts of [childhood obesity](#), there are major economic impacts, which may occur earlier than previously thought.

"Worldwide, 6.9 per cent of children under five are overweight or obese, but in countries such as Australia, USA, and UK, the figure may be as high as 23 per cent. This means nearly one in four children in Australia is overweight or obese before they start school.

"We know that children who are obese in early

childhood are more likely to be obese in later childhood, adolescence and adulthood, which can lead to serious chronic diseases that have a huge impact on our health care system. Early prevention of obesity is important to improve children's health, but there are also likely to be immediate savings in healthcare costs.

"Our results are important for [health care](#) funders and policy makers because preventing obesity in the early childhood years may be a cost-effective way to tackle the obesity crisis, improve the nation's health and reduce the economic burden of obesity."

Provided by University of Sydney

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