

New research shows obesity among Irish primary school children decreasing annually

15 October 2020

A study by University College Dublin and the HSE has shown that obesity in primary school children across Ireland is decreasing.

The latest Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI) survey, carried out as part of the World Health Organization and European Union's effort to measure weight trends in young children, found the prevalence of obesity in children aged six to ten has continued to go down year on year.

However, its findings highlight that one in five [primary school children](#) in Ireland are overweight or obese—with this number increasing to one in three children between fourth and sixth class in schools designated as disadvantaged.

The survey found that girls in fourth to sixth class were more likely to be obese or overweight than any other age and gender group.

Professor Cecily Kelleher, principal at the UCD College Of Health And Agricultural Sciences, leads the Irish research arm of COSI at the National Nutrition Surveillance Centre.

"This is the fifth round of surveillance we've conducted in Ireland as part of the WHO-EU Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative. The health of our children, largely predicts the health of our future adult population," she said.

"We know that [childhood obesity](#) is largely preventable through effective policies that can intervene early to create environments and behaviors that support healthy growth and development for all children."

Adding: "Robust population surveillance efforts like COSI are a valuable means of accessing our progress and the impact of these interventions over time.

"We're very grateful for the support of the school

communities—teachers, parents and children—who through their participation have allowed us to develop a rich understanding of childhood weight over time."

Over 5,710 children from across first to sixth class in 135 sentinel [primary schools](#) took part in the latest survey.

Commenting on the survey, Sarah O'Brien, National Lead, HSE Healthy Eating Active Living Programme said it was important to understand that obesity is not about a person's size or shape.

"Healthy weight for all children is important because we know that the consequences of childhood overweight and [obesity](#) can be lifelong, affecting quality of life and health both in childhood and adulthood.

"While the [downward trend](#) evident for children in early primary [school](#) years is very positive, the difference in prevalence evident for girls and those children attending designated disadvantaged schools is of concern.... there is a clear need to ensure that policies and actions to support children and families address the wider obesogenic environment our [children](#) live in."

Provided by University College Dublin

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