

Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives

Briefing Paper

January 2008

This brief highlights the key messages in the cross-Government strategy, Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives, together with the response of the National Healthy Schools Programme to the Strategy.

Background

The Department of Health (DH) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) published Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: A cross government strategy for England on 23.01.08.

Developed from work by the Government Office of Science's Foresight programme, this cross-government strategy suggests that, without clear action, figures on obesity will rise to almost nine in ten adults and two thirds of children will be either overweight or obese by 2050.

To provide leadership across Whitehall, the Government has established a new Cabinet Committee on Health and Well-Being. The remit of this committee includes tackling obesity and promoting healthy weight. Membership includes all of the lead departments.

Aims

The new ambition is to be the first major nation to reverse the rising tide of obesity and overweight in the population by ensuring that everyone is able to achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

The Government's initial focus will be on children. By 2020, the Government aims to reduce the proportion of overweight and obese children to 2000 levels.

The strategy clearly acknowledges that Government action alone will not be enough. Success will only come from the problem being recognised, owned and addressed at every level and by every part of society.

To help fulfil this ambition, the Foresight experts suggest that Government could best focus its actions in five main policy areas:

1. Promote children's health
2. Promote healthy food
3. Build physical activity into our lives
4. Support health at work
5. Provide effective treatment and support when people become overweight or obese

Key Points Government commitment

Children, healthy growth and healthy weight

Government's vision is for every child to grow up with a healthy weight, through eating well and enjoying being active. This will be achieved through making all schools Healthy Schools, giving better information to parents, providing feedback on NCMP data, making cooking compulsory, developing a healthy lunch box policy, making bespoke packages of support in schools to ensure that pupils who are overweight or obese increase their physical activity levels and by providing further funding for Cycling England.

Promoting healthier food choices

The vision for the future is one where the food that we eat is far healthier. This will be achieved through a number of ways. Key to this is Government's promotion of the flexibilities contained within planning regulations, so that local authorities are able to manage the proliferation of fast food outlets in particular areas e.g. near parks or schools.

Building physical activity into our lives

Government's vision is for all individuals and families to be able to exercise regularly and to stay healthy and well throughout their lives. This will be achieved through investing in a 'walking into health' campaign, aiming to get 60% of England walking at least 1,000 steps daily by 2012 – an extra 30 billion steps a day.

Creating incentives for better health

The vision is a future where all employers value their employees' health and place employees' health at the core of their business plans.

Personalise advice and support

The vision is a future where individuals have easy access to highly personalised feedback and advice on their diet, their weight, their physical activity and their health. The Government will support the commissioning of more weight management services by providing extra funding for this over the next three years. The Government will also take a number of steps to support PCTs with this.

Response of the National Healthy Schools Programme

The Strategy is the first stage of the Government's response to the Foresight report "Tackling Obesity: Future Choices and it sets out a clear vision of the role of individuals and families, the private sector, society and Government in tackling obesity.

The Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives strategy provides some direction to help achieve the Government's ambition to reverse the rising tide of obesity and overweight in the population:

- It recognises the importance of eating healthier and participating in physical activities, which are key themes in the National Healthy Schools Programme.
- It reinforces the message that all schools should be Healthy Schools
- It commits further investment to help all schools achieve National Healthy School Status, thereby making a difference to the health of their pupils.

NHSP Healthy Eating theme

- The strategy highlights the need to continue to consult with parents and carers and with children and young people about healthier food, with a particular focus on healthy lunch box policies. Approached sensitively, this consultation should also gather and act upon feedback from parents and carers.
- The strategy requires all key stage 3 students to have compulsory cooking lessons. The NHSP is already encouraging schools to provide children and young people with an opportunity to learn about a balanced diet across the curriculum, including how to plan, budget, prepare and cook meals. Previous announcements state that there will be subsidy for schools and local authorities for the direct cost of school lunches and that there will be investment in school kitchens.

NHSP Physical Activity theme

- The strategy supports the NHSP criteria, where children and young people can access a range of activities that add up to a minimum of 2 hours structured physical activity each week. Bespoke packages will be designed to increase the take up of opportunities for physical activity by children who are currently less enthusiastic. This will be informed by using the NCMP data and surveys of pupil activity.
- NHSP criteria also encourages children and young people, parents/ carers and staff to walk or cycle to school under safer conditions, utilising the school travel plan. A further £140 million funding is to go to Cycling England for improving the cycling infrastructure and skills. In addition, the Government's aim is to enable 50,000 children to take part in Bikeability cycle training by 2012.

The National Healthy Schools Programme provides a framework for the aspects of the strategy concerning healthy eating and physical activity, giving children and young people the information and skills they need to lead healthy lives as well as to support their parents in this aim. **The programme also includes the emotional health and well-being of children and young people, which is an area that goes hand-in-hand with establishing a healthy weight and healthy life.** Through the programme and with partnership working, we can provide a structure through which different aspects of school life can support and ensure the health and well-being of all children and young people, especially the most vulnerable.