

IOTF Press Release May 12 2004

Obesity and overweight rates have risen dramatically among English schoolchildren in the past five years and are four times higher than 30 years ago, according to a new report from the International Obesity TaskForce released today.

The latest figures, based on official data from the Health Survey for England for 2001/2, show that more than one in four children are overweight and 6-7% are classified as obese. Applied throughout the UK, it would mean around 2.4 million children are affected by overweight, including 700,000 who are obese.

An analysis of trends reveals that rates of overweight among both boys and girls in the 7-11 year age group are four times the level found 30 years ago. The original overweight figure in 1974 was 7% rose to 20% in 1998, and leapt even higher to 27% four years later. The narrower band of obese children in this age group increased from 1% in 1974 to 7% in 2001/2.

The estimates use IOTF definitions which provide strict conservative estimates which align childhood rates with the official WHO classification for adult overweight and obesity. The figures are calculated using a different method to the Department of Health's centiles standard which has indicated childhood obesity has risen three fold over 10 years.

The new figures for England were released alongside a new report on childhood obesity worldwide, which warned that 155 million school-age children were now overweight or obese. (see separate release – www.iotf.org/media/iotfmay12.htm). One in four children in England are overweight compared with one in 10 worldwide.

Dr Tim Lobstein, co-ordinator of the IOTF's childhood obesity group, said the latest figures for England show that the driving force behind the obesity epidemic is getting stronger. "Urgent government action is needed. It isn't enough to expect individuals and parents to cope with this on their own. The environmental factors such as the targeted marketing of children as consumers of high fat, sugar and salty foods needs to be tackled urgently," he added.

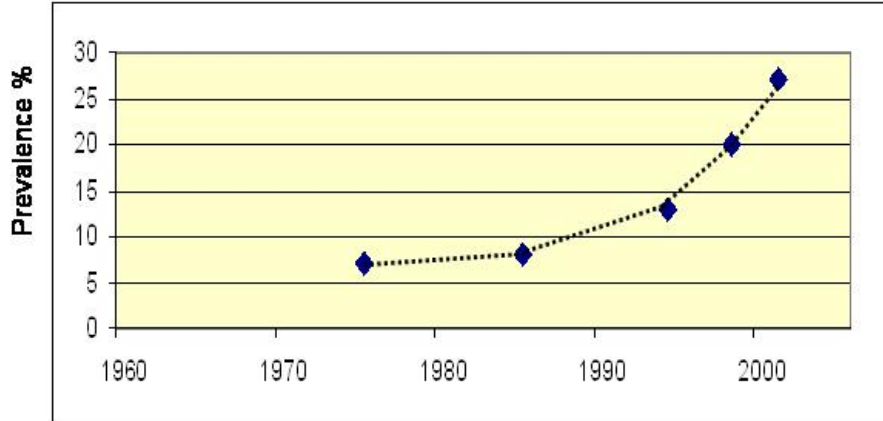
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Increase in overweight children aged 7-11 in England 1974-2002

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Data breakdown:

Trends available for age 7-11, boys and girls combined:

	1974	1984	1994	1998	2001/2
all overweight	7%	8%	13%	20%	27%
of which obese	1%	1%	2%	4%	7%

Child overweight and obesity figs (using the IOTF criteria) 2001/2

	boys	girls	all children
Age 5-15			
all overweight	22%	29%	25%
of which obese	6%	8%	7%
Primary pre-puberty age 7-11			
all overweight	23%	31%	27%
of which obese	6%	8%	7%
Secondary post-puberty age 14-15			
all overweight	22%	29%	25%
of which obese	5%	7%	6%