

In focus

Healthy London Partnership



Childhood Obesity: a plan for action - Chapter 2

25 June 2018 – Source: Department of Health and Social Care

The government has published its plan of the actions it will take to tackle childhood obesity by 2030. It commits to halve childhood obesity and significantly reduce the gap in obesity between children from the most and least deprived areas. Part one of the childhood obesity plan was published in 2016.

Overview

Part two of the government's Childhood Obesity Plan is more ambitious than its first. From part one, actions on sugar reduction have been successful in driving product reformulation – for example the Soft Drinks Industry Levy. Milk drinks may be added to the levy and there will be consultation on legislation to ban sales of energy drinks to children.

Action on calorie reduction continues. Industry is encouraged to reduce calories in popular children's foods by 20% by 2024. With industry so far missing targets on reformulation progress, it threatens tougher action if it's not met. A consultation on legislation to mandate consistent calorie labelling for the out-of-home sector (e.g. restaurants, cafes, takeaways) will take place in 2018.

There are robust measures curbing advertising and promotion of high fat salt sugar (HFSS) food and drink, including plans to legislate:

- banning adverts before 9pm and extending similar protections for the digital space
- banning location placement – for example, by check outs and at the end of aisles
- banning price promotion in retail and out-of-home settings – for example, buy one get one free and multi-buy offers.

There is no action on banning the use of brand equity, licensed characters in promoting to children (i.e. cartoons and so on).

There are no new powers for local authorities, but extra resources are planned to help them use existing powers more effectively in tackling childhood obesity.

There will be a trailblazer programme. A small number of local authorities will learn from pioneers (for example, Amsterdam) and share best practice of what works in addressing childhood obesity.

The plan is weaker on specific measures around early years and school settings. There is nothing on breastfeeding, or health services for children and families. There is some reassuring language about using the School Food Standards, Government Buying Standards and Healthy Start vouchers to promote healthier eating and finding ways of getting the least physically active children into exercise.

Reflections for London

London aspires to be the healthiest major global city. Yet, we have a major childhood obesity problem; one of the greatest of any global city.

The proportion of 10 to 11 year-olds who are an unhealthy weight in London (38.5%) is higher than the proportion in England (34.2%) and is the highest proportion in England.

Much of the planned legislation will be in consultation throughout 2018. It is vital the case continues to be pressed by London partners for ambitious action on childhood obesity. As a system, we think London has much to share:

1. Despite a commitment to significantly reducing the health inequality aspects of childhood obesity, there are no hard targets for reducing the gap in obesity between the most and least deprived areas. Relatively little in this strategy speaks directly to this ambition. The Mayor's Health Inequality Strategy contains a range of measures on how this might be done.
2. The plan also recognises the need for system change and collective action, but there is little substance on developing the structures or processes needed to genuinely work across departments or sectors to drive change. London is committed to using complex system thinking to direct our efforts – for example, creating coalitions for change, such as the new Childhood Obesity Taskforce of stakeholders from a range of settings coming together to take ownership of a problem.
3. Through devolution and regional leadership, London has demonstrated that more can be done when statutory bodies set ambitious goals. London's Great Weight Debate is an excellent example that raised awareness, galvanised policy action and identified areas for change in tackling childhood obesity. Other regional projects have included banning advertising of HFSS foods on London transport; setting 400m healthy zones around London primary schools to restrict new unhealthy fast food retailers; and establishing London as a breastfeeding-friendly capital through the UNICEF baby friendly initiative.

Full summary of commitments by the government by area

Vision

- National ambition to halve childhood obesity and significantly reduce the gap in obesity between children from the most and least deprived areas by 2030.

- The government is committed to playing its part but recognises that this will require sustained collaboration across the political divide, across society and across public and private sector organisations.
- Obesity-related conditions cost the NHS £6.1bn per year, with costs to wider society at £27bn per year.

Sugar reduction

- Highlights success of Soft Drinks Industry Levy on reformulation and considers adding sugary milk drinks to the levy.
- Reflects on 2016 challenge to industry to reduce sugar in most popular children's foods by 20%. The 5% one-year progress target has not been met by industry so will consider further use of tax system if more progress is not made in coming years.
- Will consult on legislation to limit sales of energy drinks to children by end 2018.

Calorie reduction

- The calorie reduction programme started in 2017. It challenges all food and drink companies to take 20% of calories out of a range of everyday food eaten by children by 2024.
- Will consult on introducing legislation to mandate consistent calorie labelling for the out-of-home sector by end of 2018.
- Will explore opportunities that Brexit creates for England to develop world-leading food labelling for nutritional info (plus origin and welfare standards) and work with devolved admins on implementation.

Advertising and promotions

- Will consult in 2018 on a 9pm watershed for TV advertising of HFSS products, with similar protections online, and will consider whether current, a self-regulatory approach to online advertising rules is the right approach or whether legislation is needed for the digital space.
- Will introduce legislation to ban price promotions (buy-one-get-one-free, multi-by offers, unlimited refills etc.), and promotion of unhealthy food by location (e.g. check-outs, end of aisles etc.) on unhealthy food and drinks in retail and out of home sector (consulting in 2018).
- No plans for a ban on using brand equity and licensed characters, cartoon characters and celebrities to promote HFSS food and drink. National Institute for Health Research Obesity Policy Research Unit will continue to review evidence.

Local areas

- Will develop a trailblazer programme to look at pioneers (e.g. Amsterdam), and support a small number of local authorities over three years, to show what can be done to tackle childhood obesity locally using existing powers, and to understand and share learning and best practice.
- Will develop resources that support local authorities to use their powers, for example developing business cases around healthy food, and guidance and training for planning inspectors.

Schools

- Commitment to be bold in using upcoming update of School Food Standards to further reduce sugar consumption, with guidance to caterers and schools.
- Will consult on updating the Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering Services.
- Will review how the least physically active children are currently being engaged in physical activity around school.
- Will promote a national ambition for every primary school to adopt an active mile initiative and will invest over £1.6m in 2018/19 to support walking and cycling.
- Will consult on using Healthy Start vouchers to further support children from lower income families to access healthy food.
- Ofsted will add a category including 'support of healthy behaviours' into Sept 2019 inspection framework and research how good physical development in early years might be supported through the curriculum.

➔ Read the full report on the government's website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childhood-obesity-a-plan-for-action-chapter-2>