

## Childhood Obesity in Dorset

The prevalence of obesity has been increasing for both adults and children for many years now, and the problem has become so severe that Public Health England created a new category for childhood obesity - 'severely obese'. The definition was already in use for adults, but this is the first time that the measure has been used for children.

The data show that the prevalence of childhood obesity in Dorset is below the national average. However, this needs to be looked at within the context of the UK's position as the sixth most obese nation in the world.<sup>1</sup> Reducing the prevalence of obesity in children has the potential to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals as well as reducing the likelihood of becoming obese in adulthood. There is also a financial cost - in 2016 the government estimated that obesity was costing £27bn a year.<sup>2</sup> One of the first actions the government has taken to reduce obesity, particularly among children, is the introduction of the sugar tax ('Soft Drinks Industry Levy') in April. Discussions are taking place to decide whether to extend the sugar tax to other products and to further restrict advertising of unhealthy foods.<sup>3</sup>

Big Numbers

**2.8%**

Of Reception age children in Purbeck are severely obese<sup>4</sup>

**£27bn**

Government's estimate of the cost of obesity and excess weight to the UK economy

**2.4x**

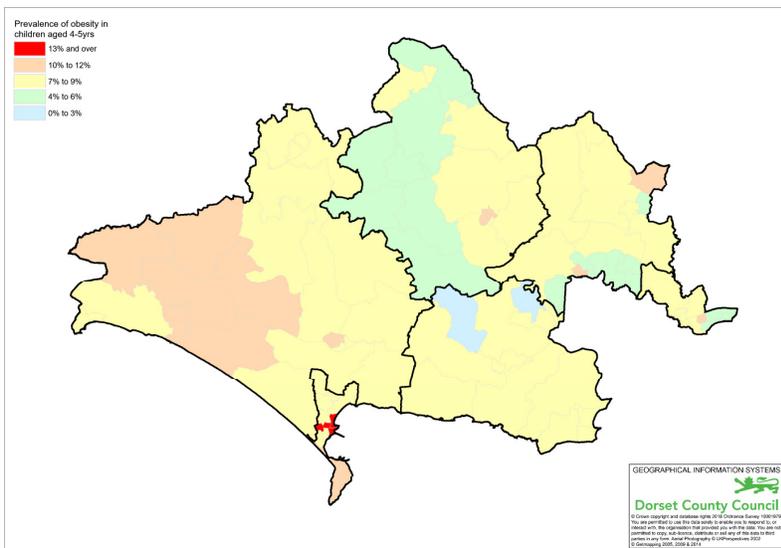
Dorset's highest rate of severe obesity among Year 6 children (Purbeck) is 2.4 times higher than that of the lowest (North Dorset)<sup>4</sup>

**14.5%**

Of reception age children in the Weymouth East Ward are obese

Severe obesity can reduce a person's life expectancy by **10 Years**

### Box 1: Reception-age obesity across Dorset



This map of reception age children's obesity levels across Dorset shows that whilst it is more prevalent in some of Dorset's more deprived areas like Underhill in Weymouth & Portland, and Grange in Christchurch; there are areas like Alderholt in East Dorset, which is one of the least deprived areas, yet have one of the highest obesity levels.

The map also highlights that urban areas tend to have higher childhood obesity levels. Weymouth, Portland, Dorchester, Blandford, Bridport and Christchurch are all at the upper end of the range.

Source: National Child Measurement Programme, 2014/15 to 2016/17, Public Health England

#### Sources:

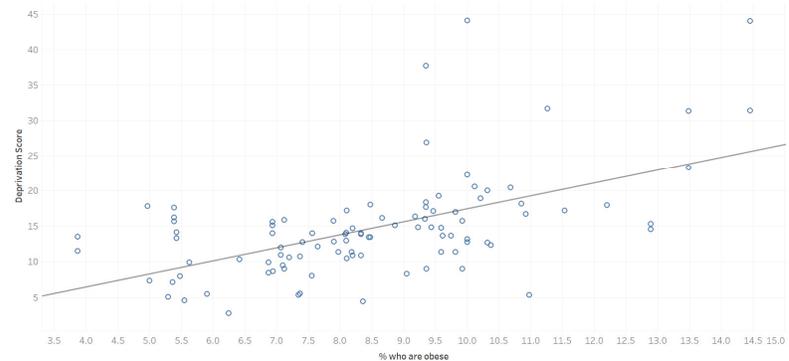
- <sup>1</sup> The world's 35 industrialised nations: [https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/health-at-a-glance-2017\\_health\\_glance-2017-en#page1](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/social-issues-migration-health/health-at-a-glance-2017_health_glance-2017-en#page1) [Accessed 05/06/18]
- <sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/budget-2016-george-osbornes-speech> [Accessed 05/06/18]
- <sup>3</sup> <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmhealth/882/88204.htm> [Accessed 05/06/18]
- <sup>4</sup> <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/search/obese#page/0/gid/1/pat/6/par/E12000009/ati/101/are/E07000048/iid/93195/age/201/sex/4> [Accessed 05/06/18]



## Box 2: Links to obesity and government interventions

- This chart shows a moderate correlation between the level of deprivation in an area and the proportion of reception age children who are obese. Childhood obesity is also linked to other factors: it is more prevalent in urban areas, and is more prevalent among boys and BME groups.

Deprivation Vs Reception Age Obesity



Source: English Indices of Deprivation (2015), DCLG & National Child Measurement Programme, Public Health England

### The sugar tax (soft drinks industry levy)

The government's new sugar tax adds up to 24p per litre to drinks that contain more than 8g per 100ml of added sugar. That's about 10 sugar cubes per 500ml bottle.<sup>5</sup>



- In 2016 the government published a paper 'Childhood Obesity - A Plan for Action'. The paper's main recommendations were: Introducing a soft drinks industry levy; reducing the amount of sugar in products by 20%; making school food healthier; and, clearer food labelling. In April the soft drinks industry levy was introduced, and in advance of this many manufacturers reduced the amount of sugar in their formulations. Time will tell if this has any effect on obesity rates.

## What are we doing about it?

Against a backdrop of falling council budgets for providing weight management services, councils are spending more on running schemes to help children stay healthy, which is key to tackling child obesity and reducing future costs to hospital, health and social care services.<sup>6</sup>

Severe obesity puts people at serious health risks, including diabetes, heart disease, stroke and cancer - obesity is the second biggest cause of cancer. Severe obesity can shorten a person's life by 10 years – an equivalent loss to the effects of lifelong smoking.<sup>7</sup>

The county council works to support people in making healthy lifestyle choices and leading active lives. The Live Well Dorset service, funded by Dorset's councils, is just one of the ways in which this support is provided.<sup>8</sup> The website provides information and advice on losing weight, support either online or over the phone, help from an expert health coach and help in setting up a diet and exercise plan. To date, over 17,000 people have signed up to the site, with most people getting the assistance they need without needing to come back.

Hopefully with the assistance provided by the county council, together with the incentives put in place by government, the rise in childhood obesity we are experiencing will recede and the next generation will live long, happy, healthy lives.

### Sources:

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-43659124>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/22000-children-severely-obese-when-they-leave-primary-school>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.livewelldorset.co.uk/>