

NSW CHILDHOOD OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY

DATA REPORT

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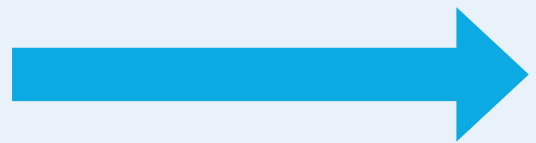
CHILDHOOD OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY

NSW children



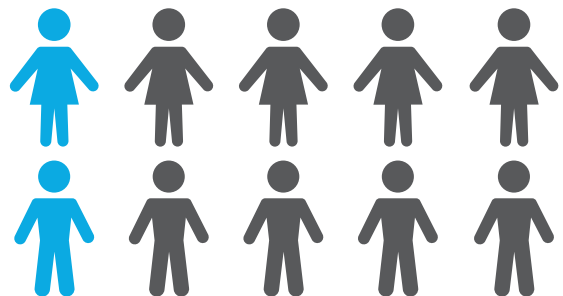
More than **1** in **5** NSW children are **OVERWEIGHT** or **OBESSE**

Overweight and obesity has remained stable over the **PAST 10 YEARS**



Overweight and obesity rates increase with **SOCIAL DISADVANTAGE**

A similar proportion of **BOYS** and **GIRLS** are overweight and obese



Overweight and obesity rates are similar for children **5-11** and **12-16** years

Overweight and obesity rates are similar across **NSW**



Introduction

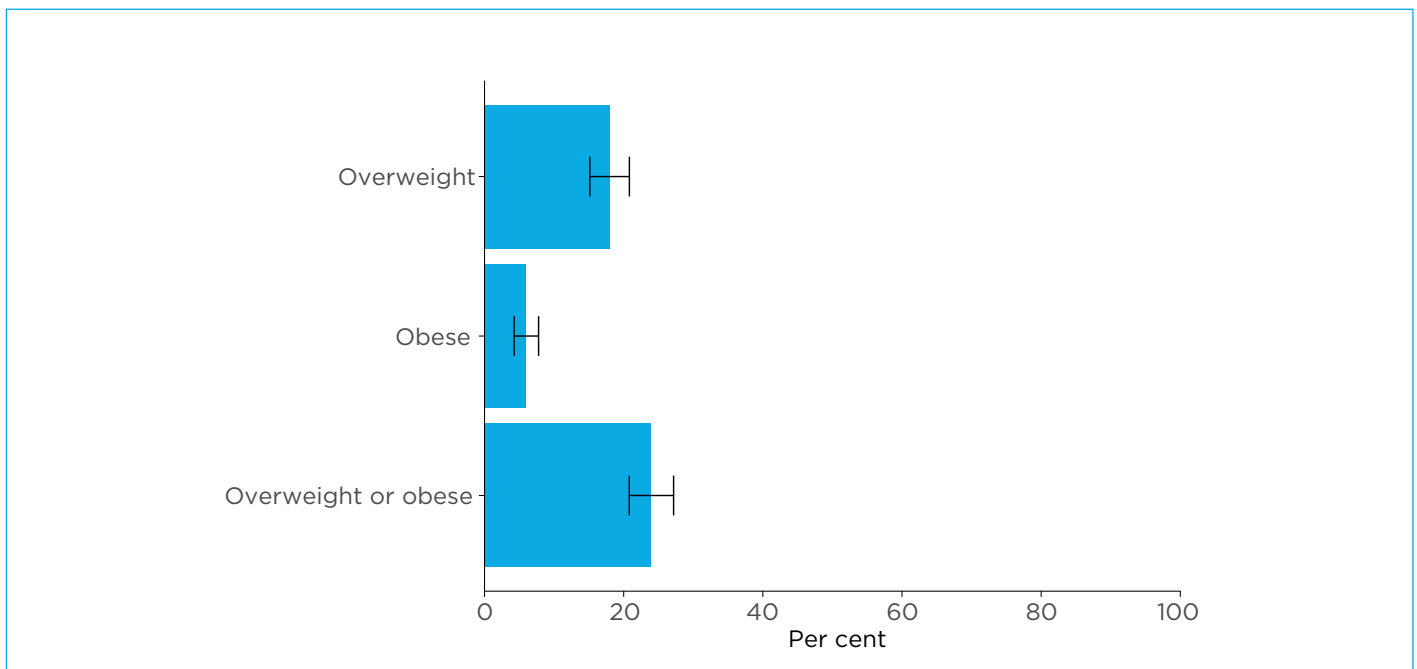
Weight gain often starts early and it is difficult to reverse. By four years of age around 25% of Australian children are already above a healthy weight.¹ Establishment of healthy behaviours during the early years of life is crucial to prevent unhealthy weight gain.

Sources of information on childhood overweight and obesity used in this report include the NSW Population Health Survey,² Schools Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey,^{3,4} Australian Health Survey,⁵ National Health Survey,¹ Australian Health and Fitness Survey 1985,⁶ and the NSW Active Kids Program.⁷ Surveys cover a sample of the population and therefore have a margin of error. In this report the margins of error, representing 95% confidence intervals, are shown as error bars ('wings') on bar charts.

More than 1 in 5 children in NSW are above a healthy weight

In NSW in 2018, more than 1 in 5 children (24%) aged 5–16 years were overweight or obese, of whom 75% were overweight and 25% were obese (Figure 1). This means about 270,000 NSW children are above a healthy weight. These children are more likely to carry excess weight into adulthood and are at increased risk of chronic disease, such as diabetes and heart disease, in later life as well as premature mortality.

Figure 1: Childhood overweight and obesity, NSW 2018

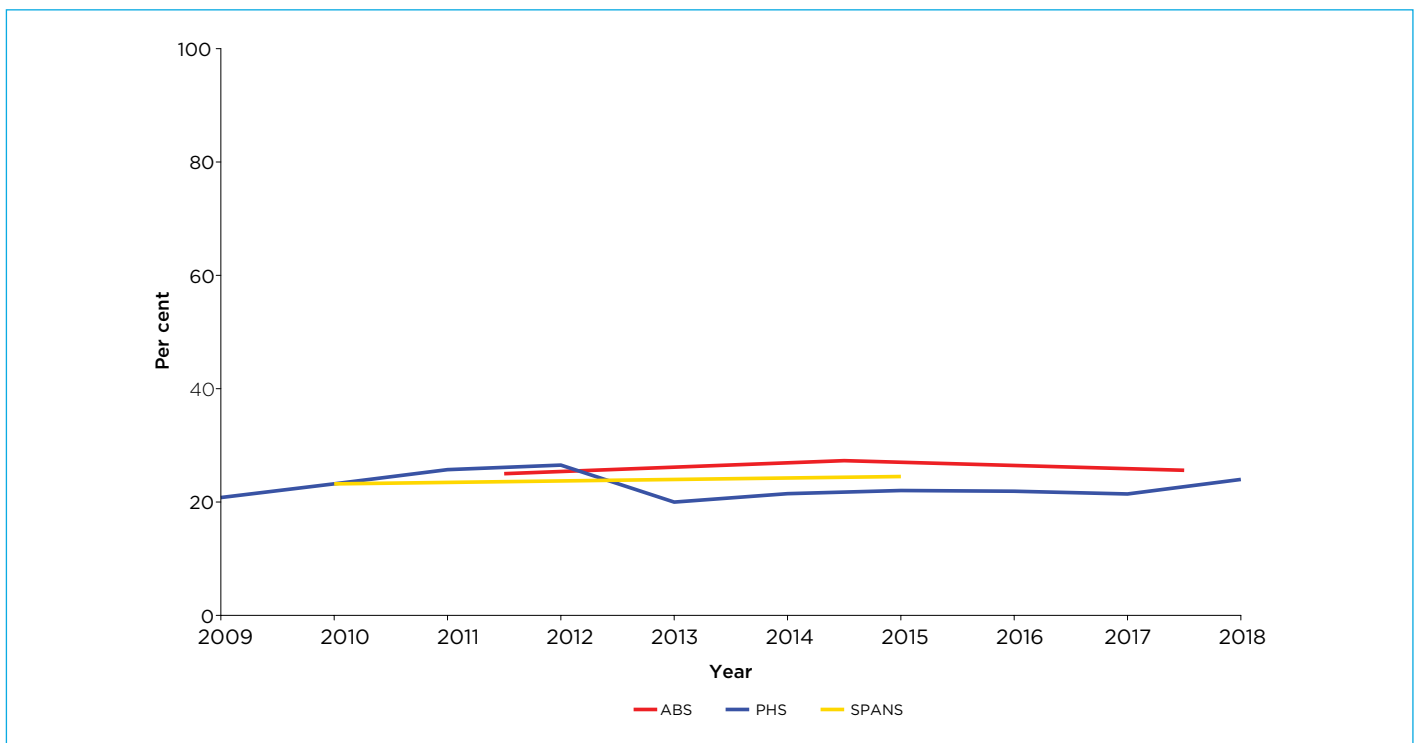


Source: NSW Population Health Survey

Rates of childhood overweight and obesity are currently stable

Between 1985 and 2004, the rate of childhood overweight and obesity more than doubled from 11% to 25%. Since 2004, the rate of childhood overweight and obesity has been stable in NSW— a pattern that has been found in three independent surveys over the last decade (Figure 2). In 2018, 25% of children who registered for the NSW Active Kids Program and provided height and weight information were overweight or obese.⁷ While rates of childhood overweight and obesity are stable, they remain high and overweight and obesity continues to be a serious public health issue.

Figure 2. Childhood overweight and obesity, NSW 2009 to 2018



Source: NSW Population Health Survey (PHS), Schools Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey (SPANS), Australian Health Survey (AHS) and National Health Survey (NHS).

PHS = children 5 to 16 years; SPANS = students in Kindergarten and Grades 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10; AHS/NHS = children 5-17 years.

Overweight and obesity across the population of children

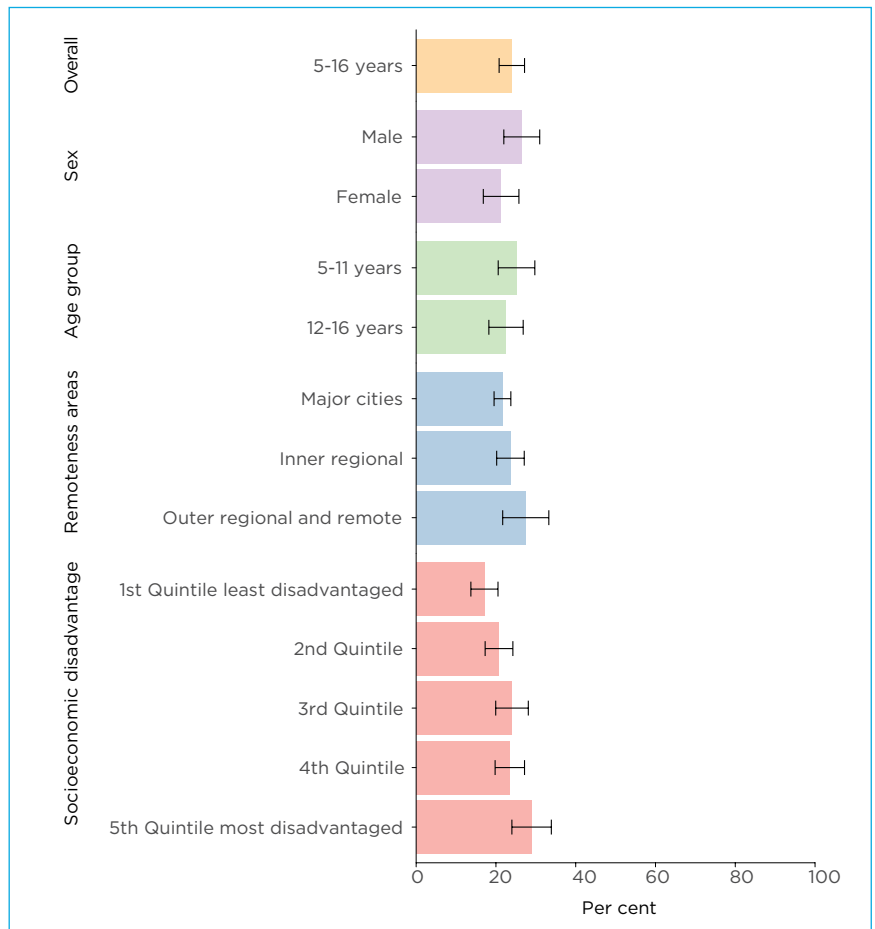
Across children in NSW, rates of overweight and obesity are (Figure 3):

- similar for boys and girls
- similar for children aged 5-11 years and 12-16 years
- similar for children living in major cities, regional and remote areas
- higher in areas of higher social disadvantage

Figure 3: Childhood overweight and obesity, by selected characteristics

Source: NSW Population Health Survey (PHS)

Notes: Analyses for NSW overall, males and females, and age groups were based on PHS 2018 data. Analyses by remoteness areas and socioeconomic disadvantage were based on PHS data for 2015 to 2018 combined. The Outer regional and remote estimate combines the remoteness areas Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote.



Parents' perceptions of their children's weight

Parents play a key role in influencing their children's behaviour. It is essential that parents are able to accurately assess their own child's weight and recognise whether overweight and obesity is an issue in their own family, in order to influence their family's behaviours.

Most parents agree obesity is a problem in the community

Parents in NSW recognise that changes in the availability of convenience foods and environmental factors that contribute to physical inactivity are the major causes of overweight and obesity.⁸ Most parents (81%) agree that overweight and obesity is a problem among children.⁹

Most parents perceive their child to be about the right weight

While parents agree that obesity is a serious issue, they are generally unable to accurately identify their own child's weight status. Around 3 in 4 (73%) parents of children (Kindergarten to Year 4) in the overweight BMI category and around 1 in 3 (30%) parents of children in the obese BMI category perceived their child to be 'about the right weight'. Comparatively, 85% of parents of children in the healthy weight BMI category perceived their child to be 'about the right weight'.³

There is some indication that parents' perceptions are influenced by the changing social norm of what is considered to be a 'healthy weight'. Around a quarter of parents (27%) stated that most people now accept that being overweight and obese is normal and not something to worry about.⁹ Health professionals and communication campaigns play an important role in supporting parents to more accurately assess their child's weight status and make positive lifestyle changes.

Monitoring overweight and obesity in the future

Surveys have consistently found that the level of childhood overweight and obesity has remained stable over recent years. However, surveys do not have a large enough sample to detect small changes in rates of overweight and obesity over time. Nor can they provide precise information on sub-groups of children such as children of different ages, or who live in different areas of NSW.

Data sources that include a large number of children, such the Active Kids Program, will be able to give very precise measures of overweight and obesity for different groups of children, but may not be representative of children generally.

With increasing recording of childhood height and weight in computer systems in NSW Health services, such as mobile dental clinics, it will be possible to determine the level of childhood overweight and obesity for groups of children that are in contact with these services. When combined with information from surveys on the use of these health services and participation in programs such as the Active Kids Program, it will be possible to use data from multiple sources to provide a more detailed and precise picture of overweight and obesity in NSW children in the future.

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