

Childhood obesity 'a ticking time bomb', campaigners say

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Wednesday 17 February 2016

MORE than one in seven of Lothian five-year-olds is clinically obese or overweight when they start school, new figures have revealed.

Official statistics for the 2014-15 school year show 14.8 per cent of primary one pupils were classed as overweight or obese, with higher rates among boys than girls.

Childhood obesity is a "ticking time bomb" which can lead to a swathe of health concerns in later life, such as heart disease, diabetes and increased risk of certain cancers, say campaigners. The data saw a nominal improvement on last year's figure of 14.9 per cent, but opponents say progress has been mostly static since 2005.

It comes after NHS figures revealed a boom in heavy babies, thanks to a rise in overweight pregnant women.

Lorraine Tulloch, programme lead at Obesity Action Scotland, said: "We cannot be complacent. Childhood obesity is a ticking time bomb which puts children at risk of future health issues, such as type 2 diabetes.

"We need to do much more to reduce childhood obesity and we must urgently improve the diet of Scottish children."

The results show regional variation as obesity levels have risen to 16 per cent in West Lothian, its highest in the last decade, making it the worst offender, followed by Midlothian with 15.6 per cent.

East Lothian performed best at 13 per cent, compared with 14.4 per cent in the Capital.

Tory young people spokeswoman Liz Smith said: "One in seven children in primary one remain clinically obese and that is a major worry for parents and teachers, as well as for our hard-pressed health services.

"Some of these statistics reflect poor diet, but they also reflect lifestyles which do not involve nearly enough exercise.

"The Scottish Conservatives want to see more health visitors working with children up to the age of seven so problems are not only spotted earlier, but continue to be addressed in the first two years of primary school."

Making sure children and families eat well and stay active are both important priorities for health chiefs, said Professor Alison McCallum, director of public health and health policy at NHS Lothian. She said: "In 2011 we launched a family based healthy weight programme providing specialist support and advice on healthy eating as well as fun physical activity sessions for children outwith a healthy weight range and their parents or carers."

City education leaders are promoting physical activity within schools.

Councillor Paul Godzik, city education leader, said: “We also actively encourage walking and cycling to school, which offers many benefits to children.

“In addition, we strive to achieve PE targets for all pupils, and are currently trialling a programme of daily physical activity in two of our schools, which we hope to roll out across the city in future.”

Public Health Minister Maureen Watt said: “Obesity is a notable public health issue in most of western Europe, and Scotland is no exception. The Scottish Government is committed to addressing it by taking action to improve diets and encourage physical activity.”

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