

Policy Extract

[Population-based approaches to childhood obesity prevention](#)

This document aims to provide Member States with an overview of the types of childhood obesity prevention interventions that can be undertaken at national, sub-national and local levels. Where relevant, the document also aims to indicate which prevention measures are likely to be the most effective.

The following guiding principles for the development of a population-based childhood obesity prevention strategy are based on those developed as part of the WHO Forum and Technical Meeting on Population-based Prevention Strategies for Childhood Obesity.

2.1 Integrated strategy

Actions to prevent childhood obesity need to be taken in multiple settings and incorporate a variety of approaches and involve a wide range of stakeholders. Sustained interventions are likely to be required at several levels – at an individual level in schools and community settings to effect behavioural change, and in sector changes within agriculture, food manufacturing, education, transportation, and urban planning.

Childhood obesity prevention efforts need to be tightly integrated with other efforts to control all major NCD risk factors (including tobacco use, alcohol intake, unhealthy diet and low physical activity).

Finally, interventions for childhood obesity prevention need to be part of existing plans and programmes that aim to improve diets and physical activity.

2.2 Policy support from multiple levels of governance

Obesity prevention interventions should be supported by policies at all levels of government – national, regional and local.

It is important to recognise that actions need not be separate. Different levels of government may wish to work together and local initiatives can and should be in line with the national and regional policies that support them.

2.3 Equity and inclusivity

Strategies and programmes need to prioritize the inclusion of vulnerable groups, particularly children with disabilities.

2.6 Engagement with multiple sectors and settings

Effective obesity prevention depends on action by multiple sectors to create a healthier environment. The development of an environment supportive of physical activity will require policy support from sectors such as urban planning (built environment), education (school-based physical activity), sport (recreational activity and inclusivity) and transport (active transport and public transport).

2.7 Transparency

Approaches which help minimize conflicts of interest include public availability of information on partnerships and mandatory disclosure of potential conflicts of interest.

Transparency is particularly important when engaging with the private sector. While public–private partnerships can improve resourcing and help to ensure sustainability, concerns have been raised regarding the influence of for-profit companies – particularly from the food industry – on the priorities of obesity prevention interventions and the selection of strategies.

2.8 Contextualisation

It is imperative that decisions regarding policy options and priority areas for action are made locally. Potential areas for action must be carefully analysed, and local, regional or country-specific factors considered. Historical, political, cultural, social and economic factors, available resources, and existing policies and systems all need to be taken into account.

Contextualization is also important when designing and implementing interventions – taking into account both the nature of the problem (e.g. the specific populations affected) and the cultural and social factors influencing health behaviours.

2.9 Sustainability

Long-term interventions have been shown to be most effective in preventing childhood obesity and sustainability of such interventions has proven a key component to their success. Strategies that improve programme sustainability include i) building on existing frameworks, recommendations, policies and datasets; ii) developing community ownership; and iii) influencing social norms.

2.10 Coordination

Relevant sectors can be identified as part of priority-setting processes at national and local levels, and should be engaged in a coordinated way to address shared goals regarding diet and physical activity.

6.4 What works in different settings

6.4.2 Primary and secondary schools

The large majority of childhood obesity prevention activities have taken place in primary and secondary schools. The most common studies involve comprehensive, multi-component programmes with interventions targeting the school environment, its food services and classroom curriculum. Many interventions combine diet and physical activity, and encourage parental involvement.

Many school-based interventions show consistent improvements in knowledge and attitudes, behaviour and, when tested, physical and clinical outcomes. Based on the latest review of the evidence, the following should be implemented as standard practice in educational settings:

- Components on healthy eating, physical activity and body image should be integrated into the regular curriculum.

- Sessions for physical activity and the development of fundamental movement skills should be included throughout the school week.
- The nutritional quality of foods made available to students, should be closely monitored and improved.
- An environment and culture should be created that supports children eating nutritious foods and being active throughout each day.
- Support should be provided for teachers and other staff to implement health promotion strategies and activities.

Parents should be engaged to support activities in the home setting to encourage children to become more active, eat more nutritious foods and spend less time in screen-based activities.