



Should primary school children be routinely screened for obesity? New research suggests not

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23 April 2007, Primary school children should not be routinely screened for obesity without any sound evidence of benefit, according to research led by a University of Reading professor.

In its 2004 report on obesity, the parliamentary Health Select Committee recommended that all schoolchildren be screened, the results fed back to parents, and overweight and obese children offered specialist treatment - at present, children aged between four and five and 10 and 11 are weighed at school and the anonymous information fed into the National Childhood Obesity Database as part of a monitoring programme.

But a new systematic review assessing the research evidence on the effectiveness of weight monitoring to identify and treat obese children - led by Reading's Professor of Paediatrics, Professor Gary Butler - has found no sound evidence of benefit.

Professor Butler said: "Our review found a lack of data on the potential impact of population monitoring, or screening for obesity and more research is indicated.

"Identification of effective weight reduction strategies for children and clarification of the role of preventative measures are priorities; it is difficult to see how screening to identify individual children can be justified without effective interventions."

What research they did find focused on how accurate weight monitoring was at diagnosing overweight and obesity - this research is now to be published in the Archives of Disease in Childhood.

Professor Butler has been working with researchers from the Centre for Reviews and Dissemination (CRD), University of York and from the Universities of Leeds and Oxford.

The researchers say that tracking individual children might help identify the long term health impacts of childhood obesity.

Dr Marie Westwood, of the University of York, said: "Standardised population level monitoring is likely to be useful for gathering information on obesity trends, informing resource planning, and could help in assessing the impact of school based preventive initiatives to improve children's diets and lifestyles.

"However, it's difficult to see how screening to identify individual children can be justified until evidence for the long term impact of interventions to treat obesity can be demonstrated. Identification of effective weight reduction strategies for children and clarification of the role of preventative measures are priorities."

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