



News Release

Strict embargo: 00:01hrs Friday 18 August 2017

Next stage of world-leading childhood obesity plan announced

- Next steps to tackle childhood obesity include a new plan to reduce excess calories in a wide range of products
- Public Health England to consider the evidence, set guidelines and closely monitor progress on calorie reduction

One year on from the launch of the world leading childhood obesity plan, Public Health England (PHE) has been asked by government to tackle excess calorie consumption by children.

As set out in the plan, PHE will now consider the evidence on children's calorie consumption and set the ambition for the calorie reduction programme to remove excess calories from the foods children consume the most.

Ready meals, pizzas, burgers, savoury snacks and sandwiches are the kinds of foods likely to be included in the programme.

Over the past year, real progress has been made on reducing the level of sugar in many products.

The Soft Drinks Industry Levy has become law and will come into effect in April 2018 and PHE has formulated a comprehensive sugar reduction programme with the aim of a 20% reduction in sugar in key foods by 2020. Leading retailers and manufacturers have also announced they are, or already have, lowered the amount of sugar in their products as a result of these programmes.

Sugar reformulation was a vital first step under the childhood obesity programme, however overconsumption of calories will continue to have a detrimental effect on the health of our children without further action.

Adults currently consume on average between 200–300 calories too many each day and children are following suit, with food more readily available than ever before. Reducing calorie consumption from sources other than sugar is critical to reversing the worrying obesity trend, which shows:

- 1 in 3 children are either overweight or obese by the time they leave primary school
- More children in the UK than previously are being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, some as young as seven
- Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be obese

Philip Dunne, Minister of State for Health said:

"Too many of our children are growing up obese, which can lead to serious health complications. We all have a responsibility to help people live healthier lives, but with a third of children leaving primary school obese we must take a comprehensive approach and now focus on excess calories.

"This can only be done through strong guidance, grounded in evidence – that's why we have funded a new £5 million dedicated Obesity Research Policy Unit to understand the deeper causes of obesity."

Duncan Selbie, chief executive of PHE, said:

"A third of children leave primary school overweight or obese and an excess of calories – not just excess sugar consumption – is the root cause of this.

"We will work with the food companies and retailers to tackle this as the next critical step in combating our childhood obesity problem."

PHE will publish the evidence in early 2018. Following this it will then consult with the food industry, trade bodies and health NGOs to develop guidance and timelines for the calorie reduction programme.

The Department of Health has also funded a policy research unit – the £5 million National Institute for Health Obesity Research Policy Unit at University College London – which will look to develop a deeper understanding on the causes of childhood obesity, including marketing to children and families, social inequalities, and the early years of childhood.

Professor Russell Viner, Policy Research Unit Director and Professor of Adolescent Health, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, said:

"Obesity is one of the greatest health concerns of our time and we welcome this considerable and very timely investment from the government. We are delighted that the UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health will host the new Obesity Policy Research Unit (OPRU). Preventing obesity in early life is key to turning the tide on this modern epidemic."

-ends-

Notes to Editors

For further information on the calorie reduction programme please contact:

- Dominique Lemon / dominique.lemon@phe.gov.uk / 020 765 48034

For more information on the new Obesity Research Policy Unit please contact:

- Naomi Stanley – naomi.stanley@dh.gsi.gov.uk / 0207 210 5919

1. Since the childhood obesity plan was published, retailers and manufacturers like Nestle, General Mills, Lucozade Ribena Suntory, Tesco, Waitrose, Kellogg's, Sainsbury's, Marks and Spencer, Greggs, Starbucks and Breck's Food have announced they are, or already

have, lowered the amount of sugar in their products.

2. The [sugar reduction programme](#) sees Public Health England working with the food and drink industry to remove 20% of the sugar children (up to 18 years of age) consume from the foods that contribute the most sugar to their diets by 2020. [Guidelines](#) that set out the approaches the food industry should take to achieve this target were published in March alongside baseline levels of sugar in products.
3. The Soft Drinks Industry Levy comes into effect in April 2018. Drinks with more than 8g of total sugar per 100ml will pay 24p per litre, with drinks between 5g and 8g sugar per 100ml paying 18p. Drink with less than 5g sugar per 100ml are exempt.
4. The free Change4Life Be Food Smart app helps families see the amount of sugar, salt and saturated fat in food and drinks. More information is on the [Be Food Smart website](#)
5. It is estimated 40,000 deaths per year in England are attributable to being overweight or obese (over 10% of all deaths). An estimated 70,000 premature deaths in the UK could be avoided each year if UK diets matched nutritional guidelines.