

# Cautious optimism as childhood obesity rates in Ireland plateau

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Childhood overweight and obesity rates have plateaued in primary school aged children in the Republic of Ireland, reveals research published today in the open access journal *BMC Public Health*. The study found that although obesity rates remain high, there is evidence that they have stabilised and may be beginning to fall.

During the last three decades of the 20th century, a two to three fold increase in overweight and [obesity prevalence](#) in school age children was reported across regions in North America and Western Europe. It was estimated that by the year 2000, 25-33% of all children in many developed countries would be overweight and obese, and that obesity rates would continue to rise in the future. However, recent studies have indicated that rates in developed countries may be starting to stabilise.

To find out whether these trends were reflected in the Republic of Ireland, researchers from University College Cork and University College Dublin conducted a systematic review of childhood overweight and obesity rates in primary school aged children between 2002 and 2012. The review also looked at morbid obesity rates in children in the Republic of Ireland for the first time.

Analysing data from 14 studies conducted during the 10 year time frame, the researchers found that childhood overweight rates had remained stable, but national obesity rates dropped from a constant 7% to 4% after 2008. Up to 1 in 50 children were shown to be morbidly obese, however there was no significant change in the prevalence of

morbid obesity over the decade. The study also found that, on average, the prevalence of overweight and obesity was higher in girls than in boys. This research was funded by the National Children's Research Centre in Crumlin.

"Our research suggests that prevalence rates of childhood obesity in Ireland have levelled off, but one in four Irish children remain overweight or obese. Obesity continues to have a significant impact on health and wellbeing, therefore policies that tackle the problem should be intensified," said lead author of the study, Eimear Keane from University College Cork.

The authors conclude that there is now a clear need for standardised methods for the conduct of studies that measure [overweight and obesity](#) in childhood in order to track future prevalence rates more effectively.

**More information:**

[www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/14/974/abstract](http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/14/974/abstract)

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