

Saudis organise public run to tackle rising obesity

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Levels of diabetes and obesity are rising in Saudi Arabia, an official said on Wednesday, as Riyadh announced its first publicly organised run to promote a more active lifestyle.

The "Run 4 Riyadh" will take place in the Saudi capital on February 28 over five kilometres (three miles), from King Abdullah Park to Prince Faisal bin Fahd Stadium.

Running will not be obligatory—participants can also walk or jog, organisers said.

The run "is a great motivation towards a healthier, more active life", Riyadh governor Prince Turki bin Abdullah said at a press conference.

The run is only open to males and a separate women's event organised by a local university will be held on a different date.

The sexes are strictly segregated in Saudi Arabia, which practises a conservative brand of Islam, and women are required to dress in black from head to toe when outside their homes.

An oil-rich desert nation, Saudi Arabia lacks public sport facilities but Western-style fast food restaurants are widespread.

The kingdom is confronted by the "epidemic spread of several diseases such as diabetes, [obesity](#), blood hypertension and [high cholesterol levels](#)

," Adnan bin Sulaiman al-Abdulkarim, Riyadh's director general of health affairs, said in a statement.

Over the past 30 years, [diabetes](#) has spread from two percent of the population to 13 percent, he said, while obesity affects around one-third of men and women.

Organisers said they hope the run, which costs 50 riyals (\$13.33) to enter, will be held annually.

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