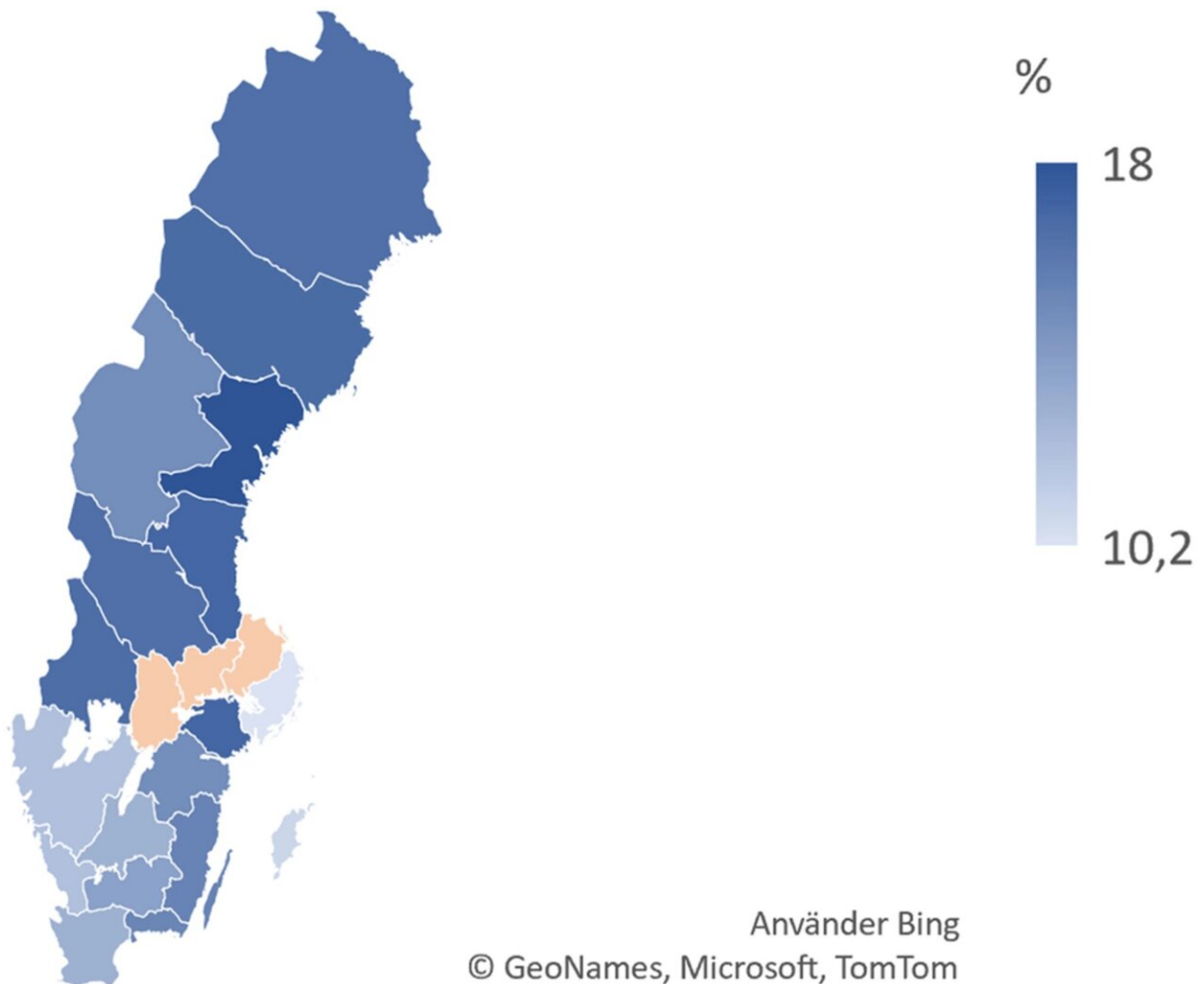


# More children in Sweden became overweight during the pandemic, finds study

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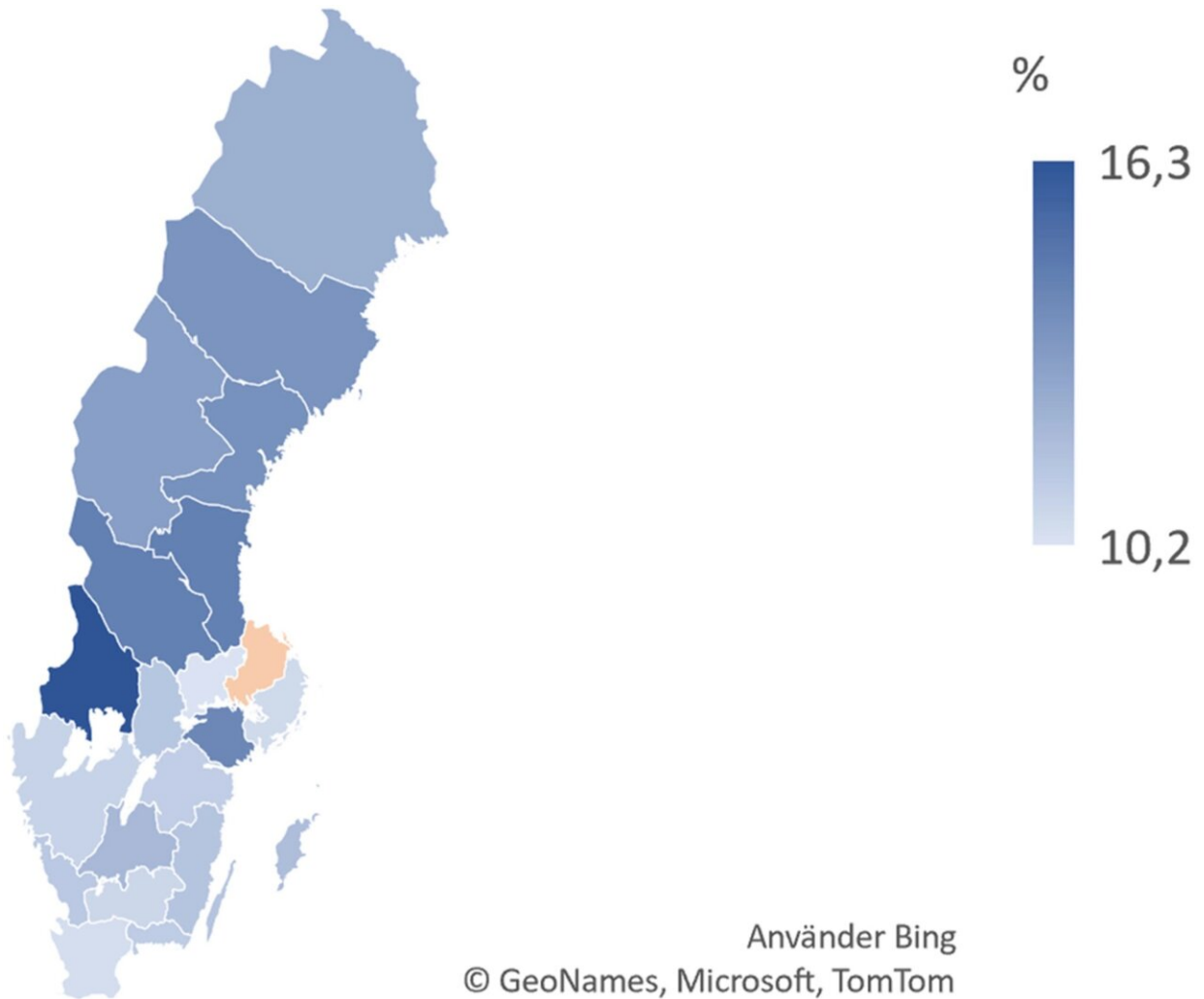


Overweight and obesity among 4-year-olds in 2020. Credit: *Acta Paediatrica* (2023). DOI: 10.1111/apa.16707

Overweight and obesity among 4-year-olds increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a new study by Uppsala University involving more than 200,000 children in Sweden. The number of children with obesity increased by some 30%, and there are large regional differences. The study was published in the journal *Acta Paediatrica*.

"Given that Sweden was one of the countries that did not have a lockdown during the pandemic, this increase is startling," notes Paulina Nowicka, Professor of Food Studies, Nutrition and Dietetics at the Department of Food Studies, Nutrition and Dietetics at Uppsala University and one of the researchers behind the study.

The comprehensive new study includes [health](#) care data from some 200,000 children across Sweden. This data comes from the routine age-4 check-up conducted at children's health care centers and offered to all families. The figures in the study were collected between 2018 and 2020. International studies with similar results have previously been conducted, but even in international comparisons this study is the largest compilation to date.



Overweight and obesity among 4-year-olds in 2018. Credit: *Acta Paediatrica* (2023). DOI: 10.1111/apa.16707

The first year on which the study is based was 2018, when 11.4% of children were overweight or had obesity. Two years later in 2020, or the first year of the pandemic, this figure had risen to 13.3%—an increase of almost 17%. Morbid obesity had increased most of all. In 2020, 30% more children had the disease of obesity compared with two years earlier.

"It was surprising for us that the greatest increase was seen in obesity. This indicates that those who had been struggling before the pandemic found things even harder in 2020," notes Charlotte Nylander, Senior Consultant in Child Health Care, for Region Sörmland and one of the authors of the study.

It is well known that being overweight and having obesity in particular cause many different health problems for the children and young people affected. It is also known that these problems continue into adulthood and bring with them many [negative health effects](#) at that stage too.

"This is why it's important to establish good habits early on in life and to monitor health habits and growth over time. Health-promoting and preventive efforts are needed at many levels across society to avoid [children](#) developing obesity," continues Nylander.

The study also showed clear regional differences in the prevalence of being overweight and having [obesity](#). A significant rise was noted in most regions, but the prevalence varies greatly across the country. More studies are needed to monitor the trend over a longer period.

**More information:** Jessica Miregård et al, National data showed an increased prevalence of overweight and obesity among four-year-old Swedish children during the first year of COVID -19, *Acta Paediatrica* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/apa.16707](https://doi.org/10.1111/apa.16707)

Provided by Uppsala University

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