



National Child Measurement Programme Media Pack

September 2010

DH INFORMATION READER BOX

Policy	Estates
HR / Workforce	Commissioning
Management	IM & T
Planning /	Finance
Clinical	Social Care / Partnership Working

Document Purpose For Information

Gateway Reference 14777

Title National Child Measurement Programme Media Pack

Author DH

Publication Date 06 Sep 2010

Target Audience Directors of PH, Communications Leads, Public Health and obesity leads

Circulation List

Description The NCMP Media Pack is for those who work on NCMP or in communications. The pack includes information to help deal with media queries or with questions from parents.

Cross Ref NCMP guidance for PCTs 2010-2011

Superseded Docs n/a

Action Required n/a

Timing w/c 6 September

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For Recipient's Use

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1. Introduction

As you begin to prepare for the start of a new year on the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP), we thought it would be helpful to put together some resources that we hope you will find useful.

This NCMP Media Pack is for those who work on NCMP or in communications. This pack includes information to help you or your team deal with media queries, promote your local area's successes or answer questions from parents.

It includes:

- information you can use when responding to enquiries from the media or from parents;
- key messages about the importance of the programme and the reason why we tell parents their child's result;
- answers to some of the questions often asked by journalists and
- materials to help you promote some of the good work in your local area on NCMP and to reduce obesity.

NCMP is an important part of the work to reduce child obesity as it allows the monitoring of obesity levels nationally and can help local areas to plan and target services.

As part of the programme, parents are sent their child's result. We know from our research that parents want to receive their child's result however, weight is a sensitive issue, particularly in children and so this letter can be difficult for some parents to receive. We also know from research that most parents don't recognise that their child is overweight and with 1 in 3 children overweight or obese it is hard to tell if a child is an unhealthy weight just by looking at them.

The good news is that, although prevalence of childhood obesity is still too high, thanks to the hard work of the NHS and partners, rates are levelling off. However, to help continue this good work, we need to ensure there are positive messages in the media about the importance of everyone maintaining a healthy weight and the contribution of the NCMP as a catalyst for families to change their lifestyle. The media can also play an important role in encouraging parents to allow their children to be weighed and measured, raising awareness of the programme and explaining the reasons why parents are sent their child's results.

If you have any questions or need advice or help please contact us at NCMP@dh.gsi.gov.uk

Kind regards,
NCMP Team
Department of Health

2. Dealing with queries from the press

You may get press queries from the local and national media about NCMP and some of these queries might be about parents who are upset after receiving their child's results.

Below are some key messages that may be helpful. These messages points have been developed as a guide and you may already have developed your own lines, in which case you might want to compare them against those below.

NCMP Key Messages

- It's important we keep track of our children's weight - 1 in 3 children are currently overweight or obese, and that could lead to health problems in the future.
- Modern life has brought many positives, but it has also made it harder for us to make healthy choices. It is too easy to eat unhealthy foods and harder to keep active.
- If we carry on as we are then 9 out of 10 children may grow up with dangerous levels of fat in their bodies, putting them at greater risk of developing cancer, type 2 diabetes and heart disease in later life.
- We have several initiatives in place to help people achieve and maintain a healthy weight and the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) is one of these.
- The NCMP provides our area with important information about the rates of child obesity in our area and enables us to develop programmes to support families where they are needed.
- Additionally, we know from research commissioned by the Department of Health that parents want this type of information. The letters mean parents can make informed decisions about their children's health.
- Parents want the best for their children – this information helps them make those positive decisions.
- Without this information, parents may be left in the dark and without the chance to change things if they want to.
- Weight is not an easy subject, and it can be hard for parents to hear that their child is overweight. Many parents are surprised with the results.
- Sadly, because so many children now are overweight (which doesn't always mean they look 'overweight') it is hard to tell just by looking at them when a child's weight is higher than it should be. This is why doing the measuring is so important.
- BMI is the best measure we have and is the best way to tell if most children are a healthy weight.
- The good news is that parents can make a difference by making small changes to their child's diet and activity levels.
- Parents can get further support to help their child achieve a healthy weight from their local NHS.
- And we're leaving it to parents to decide what to do with the information and whether they share it with their child.

3. Questions and answers for media queries

These Q&As can be used when there is a specific question from a journalist about NCMP. Again, you may have lines that you have already prepared but these may help when you when dealing with media queries.

The results letter

1. Some parents are very unhappy with the letter they received about their child's weight

We know that weight is a sensitive issue, particularly in children, and so the result letter can be difficult for some parents to receive. However, we believe it is important to provide information to parents about their child's health.

Research commissioned by the Department of Health (DH) shows that parents want this type of information and find the letter useful. Other research suggests that most parents don't recognise that their child is overweight and most think they are a healthy weight. Because so many children now are overweight it is hard to tell just by looking at them when a child's weight is higher than it should be.

1 in 3 children are currently overweight or obese. Research shows that children who are overweight are more likely to grow up to be overweight adults and that can lead to health problems like heart disease, some cancers and type 2 diabetes.

2. What about children who are just overweight – isn't this just causing unnecessary panic in parents?

Parents don't need to panic if the letter indicates that their child is overweight. Telling parents their child's results will help them to monitor their child's health and to take early action to improve their child's lifestyle so they can reduce their chances of ill-health later in life. Tips and information are included alongside the letter as well as a contact number if parents wants further advice.

3. Why do we need to take the measurements? Can't we tell from looking at a child if they are overweight?

Research by the Department of Health shows that most parents of overweight or obese children think that their child is a healthy weight. As so many children now are overweight today it is hard to tell just by looking at them if their weight is higher than it should be. Some children who are overweight are suffering health problems and the number of children with type 2 diabetes is increasing. Also, children who are overweight are more likely to become obese adults - and obese adults have increased risks of developing type 2 diabetes, some cancers, and heart or liver diseases.

Sharing the results with parents and ensuring they are aware of the health risks their child might face, equips them with the information they need to assess the risks and make appropriate lifestyle changes. Other parents will be reassured

that their child is a healthy weight and they will be given information to help their family continue to eat healthily and be active.

4. Is the NCMP just another Government initiative forced on the NHS?

The NCMP provides local areas with important information about the rates of child obesity and enables them to develop programmes to support families where they are needed.

The results letters are intended to encourage parents and carers to ensure their children eat well and take exercise, and to let parents know what support is available to them. The results are a good way of encouraging families to think about healthy lifestyles, and help us [the local NHS] to plan and provide better health services for local children

We know from research commissioned by the Department of Health that parents want this type of information. The letters can help parents make informed decisions about their children's health. Without this information, parents may be left in the dark and without the chance to change things if they want to.

5. How can a child who eats healthily and is active be classed as overweight?

Research shows that most parents underestimate the amount of food their children eat and overestimate the amount of activity they do. Therefore, it is important that parents have this information about their child's weight so they can make changes to their families' lifestyle.

6. Why aren't parents given the actual BMI number and growth charts in the letter?

BMI is used in adults, but for children, BMI centile is used. This takes into account the child's age and sex. BMI centile allows parent to see if their child is growing as expected. This is something parents may have done when their child was a baby, using the growth charts in the Personal Child Health Record. Once a child's BMI centile has been calculated, they will be in one of four categories: underweight, healthy weight, overweight, or very overweight.

7. How was the results letter developed?

The results letter was developed in consultation with a range of health experts, health professionals and parents to ensure that the information provided is scientifically robust and accurate, and, importantly, is useful and informative for parents. We know from Department of Health research that parents think the letter is helpful and that most parents say they would take action to change their family's lifestyle after receiving it.

We have taken on-board the findings of the Department of Health research as well as feedback from the NHS and parents, and have revised the wording of the template letter for the 2010/11 school year.

8. What happens if the PCT makes a mistake and the wrong results are sent to a parent?

Throughout the data-collection process, data protection and security is a high priority. We take care to ensure a high standard of accuracy when producing results letters.

As with similar programmes, there is a possibility that human error will lead to an incorrect result being sent out. However, the local NHS staff working on the NCMP are aware of the importance and sensitivity of the information they are dealing with, and when producing the letters, some automated checks are done on the information, so the risk of error should be minimal.

Many parents are surprised with the results because we are used to changing body shapes due to rising obesity levels. If the parent is unsure about the result, they should contact the telephone number provided on the letter.

9. Weighing and measuring increases risk of anorexia or eating disorders

We know that weight is a sensitive issue, particularly in children. We leave it up to parents to decide what to do with the results letter and whether they share it with their child. The letter is not addressed to them and is marked private and confidential.

We know from Department of Health research that parents want this type of information and find it useful. Other independent, academic research has looked at changes made by families after children were weighed and measured and their parents have received the results. The studies showed positive changes were made to children's diet including reducing sugary drinks and high sugar snacks, and that any adverse effects were minimal.

From the data gathered through the NCMP over the last six years, we know that the proportion of children who are underweight has not increased and is at about the level we would expect (around one percent of children are underweight). Although, the proportion of children who are overweight or obese has not significantly increased over the time that NCMP began, the proportion of children who are overweight or obese far exceeds what would be expected in a healthy population.

Questions local areas may want to consider having lines on

- Will you follow-up with parents who receive a letter telling them their child is overweight or obese?
- What help are you providing for parents with overweight/very overweight children?
- What are you doing to help reduce obesity in your area?
- What are the obesity rates in your local area?

General NCMP questions

10. What is the National Child Measurement Programme?

Established in 2005, England's National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) has produced one of the largest and most robust collections of data on children's height and weight in the world, with over 1 million children measured during the 2008/09 academic year. Every year, children in Reception Year and in Year 6 are weighed and measured during the school year as part of this programme.

The NCMP results help us as the local NHS to plan and provide better health services for local children. We are using NCMP to engage with parents and carers by sending them their child's results and offering information, advice and services, which provides an opportunity for families to make lifestyle changes.

The quality of data means that it is officially recognised by The Government Statistical Service/Office for National Statistics/UK National Statistics.

11. How does weighing and measuring children stem the obesity epidemic?

The collection of this information allows us to monitor progress towards tackling obesity and helps local areas focus resources to those of greatest need. By sending parents their child's results, parents are made aware of their child's weight and encouraged to make changes to their families lifestyle.

12. Is BMI accurate in children?

BMI centile is a good way of finding out whether a child is a healthy weight and is used by healthcare professionals. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has recommended that BMI centile is the most appropriate assessment technique to determine overweight and obesity in children.

By comparing a child's weight with their height, age and sex, we can tell whether they're growing as expected. This is something parents may have done when their child was a baby, using the growth charts in the Personal Child Health Record (the red book).

Once a child's BMI centile has been calculated, they will be in one of four categories:

	BMI centile range
Underweight	below 2 nd BMI centile
Healthy weight	between 2 nd and 90 th BMI centile
Overweight	Between 91 st up to 97 th BMI centile
Very Overweight (doctors call this clinically obese)	At or above 98 th BMI centile

Most children should fall in the healthy weight range, with fewer than one in ten in the overweight or very overweight range, but today up to one in four children may fall into this range because of increasing obesity levels.

Research shows that children who are overweight or very overweight have higher risk of ill health like diabetes, some cancers and heart disease in later life.

13. How does the NCMP fit in with the Change4Life movement?

Change4life is helping to raise awareness about obesity and the health risks of being overweight. The campaign recognises that modern life has brought many positives, but it has also made it harder for us to make healthy choices. Change4Life provides parents with simple tips for families to eat healthy food and get more active.

When parents receive their child's results they also receive a *Change4Life* information booklet with these tips. The booklet also gives details of the *Change4life* website (www.nhs.uk/change4life) and a telephone helpline where parents can get more information about healthy lifestyles and details about activities happening in their local area.

4. How to get your story heard

Please note - this section is to help people who may not have a comms background or a comms team helping them with NCMP. It provides some ideas for getting your story heard and a press notice template that you can use when promoting a story.

We know that many local areas are doing great work on NCMP and on reducing child obesity. You may already have a good relationship with your local media and regularly get stories in the press that highlight this work.

At a local level you can use the media to help get across why NCMP and the results letters are important in helping to promote the health of people living in your area.

As you know, journalists are always looking for local, newsworthy stories that capture the imagination and one thing that will sell a story to them is including real people who really know what it is like to make the step towards adopting a healthy lifestyle. It is not just the local newspaper that would be interested in a story, your local authority may have a newsletter or residents publication that you could use as well.

To help get your story heard included in this pack is:

- Template press notice
- An example of a press release on NCMP
- A positive story on NCMP in the local press in the North East

As you will be aware NCMP does attract media interest so it is worth getting help with these types of stories from a comms person if possible. If that is not possible then it is worth thinking carefully about how your local media will cover the story and if they will report it in a favourable light.

5. Template Press Notice

[Insert Your Logo]

Press Release

Issued: (Date)

For Immediate Release OR Embargoed Until: (Date) (delete as appropriate)

[An Eye- catching Headline]

[Opening paragraph] The first sentence should be a summary of the story and include who, what, when, where, how and why. Use this first paragraph to get your main points across and maintain the journalist's attention so that he/she will want to read further. For example, an announcement about an obesity programme in your area or the success of a Change4Life event in your neighbourhood. Check your target publication e.g. local newspaper or council magazine for the appropriate writing style.

[Second paragraph] Use the second paragraph to expand on the details. Write about why the story is new, special, unusual or unique and why it will appeal to their readers. The aim is to get journalists to pick the story up, so they're looking for something fresh with a human interest.

[Third paragraph (A subtitle here is optional)] This paragraph can be used to link NCMP in with a broader story about obesity or Change4Life.

[Remainder of the text] Include quotes from people connected to the story eg. the person/people whom it's about, their family or friends, NHS staff, members of the public etc, and remember to back up any claims that you make with evidence such as statistics or findings from published studies. Make your story appropriate and relevant for the time.

Conclude with details such as dates, times and how you can be contacted. Keep it brief as further details can go in the 'Notes to editors' section below.

Send your complete press release to the Editor of your local newspaper or radio station.

##ENDS##

Notes to editors

1. Tell the editor who to contact for more information: direct telephone line, mobile and email address.
2. Include a few lines on background information of your organisation or your programme i.e. when it was launched, what you have achieved, awards and recognitions.
3. Include your organisation or programme name, fax number, email and website.
4. State whether you have photos available.

6. Example of a press release on NCMP

North Tyneside family backs child measurement programme after son transforms his life

Local families have backed a national programme which measures children's height and weight and then offers advice and support where appropriate.

Parents will be receiving letters this week to inform them of their child's height and weight measurements as part of the National Child Measurement Programme.

Over 5,000 school children in North Tyneside have had their weight and height measured at school as part of a drive to offer children and their families support to manage their weight.

Local mother and son Fiona Surrey and nine-year-old Matthew known as Matty, have backed the programme after Matty has transformed his life to become fit and healthy and see his confidence grow.

"I think it is important to know your child's measurements so you can keep track of their weight and health. I agree this should be optional and the parent's decision but I would urge them to take part and it helps to maintain the health of your children and the rest of the family."

Matty attended two Carnegie Club programmes in North Tyneside before the new Healthy4Life sessions which he is now enjoying. He has also travelled to the Lake District to take part in a week's residential activity course at High Borrans.

His mum Fiona, 28, of High Farm, Wallsend, said the whole family has transformed their lives thanks to the support from North Tyneside Primary Care Trust (PCT).

"I have seen a 360 degree turn with Matty. He is a completely different boy as his confidence has come back and he is so much more outgoing. He is eating different food and his palate has changed.

"We go to the sessions together and the whole family is committed to this. I think that is what is so important as often it is the parents who need to change their attitudes as well."

Matty recently completed a 10k Healthy4Life Strike Out walk from North Shields Parks to Whitley Bay lighthouse.

"He was adamant he wanted to do it. To get him off his play station six months ago would have been such a struggle for me."

Fiona said Matty now has a good attitude to food and she hopes he will continue to make healthy choices when he goes to High School and beyond.

"It is going back to basics for me personally. I was doing a mad trolley dash round the supermarket and trying to economise buying cheapest food. But this has taught me I can still shop on a budget but make wise choices. Now I read the food labels and buy more fresh food. We don't have bread in the house but eat wraps instead.

(continued over...)

“I have helped my friends and family with this now also sharing the information and tips to be healthy.”

Dawn Scott, public health consultant for obesity for NHS North of Tyne, working on behalf of North Tyneside PCT said: “Under the Change4Life banner weight management schemes encourage families to adopt healthy lifestyles by eating a healthy diet and taking plenty of exercise. We also run a number of food co ops and cooking sessions to help people to eat healthily on a budget.

“Without help, overweight children will become overweight or obese adults and will be at increased risk of heart attacks, high blood pressure, diabetes and stroke.”

Notes to editors

National Childhood Measurement Programme

- The National Childhood Measurement Programme is a shared national programme between the Department for Children, Schools and Families, and the Department of Health.
- Under the programme primary care trusts (PCTs) and local authorities measure the weight and height of children in reception class, ages four to five, and year six, ages ten to 11, on an annual basis during the summer term.
- Parents have the choice to opt out of the scheme, which is now in its fifth year, and if their child takes part they will receive a results letter informing them of their child's measurements before schools break up for summer.
- The letters offer further advice and support from the local NHS if their child is found to be overweight to help the whole family learn more about nutrition and exercise in a fun environment.

Healthy4Life in North Tyneside

- Children and their families can get fit and healthy thanks to a new club in North Tyneside called Healthy4Life.
- Healthy4Life is a new free ten week weight management programme for children between the ages of seven and 12 and their families.
- The exciting new club is split into two parts - lifestyle changes and physical activity sessions. The lifestyle sessions focus on nutrition, behaviour change and goal setting, while the physical activity sessions are a large variety of fun sports and activity sessions aimed to enhance the young people's skills.

For more information please contact:
North Tyneside
Children's Health and Activity Team (CHAT)
Tel: 0191 643 7454
Email: CHAT@northtyneside.gov.uk

For more information on Change4Life please visit <http://www.nhs.uk/change4life>

7. Example of positive coverage of NCMP

News Post Leader

jobs today property today motors today local pages today

Campaign helping mum and son in fitness drive



Justin Singh Gill and his mum Doreen.

Published Date:

09 July 2010

By [PETRA SILFVERSKIOLD](#)

AN ASHINGTON mum is backing a national programme which measures children's height and weight and offers support to help them lead a more healthy lifestyle.

Doreen Singh Gill, 46, and her ten-year-old son Justin, have attended two Get Active Northumberland (GAN) programmes at Ashington Leisure Centre for the last six months.

"I think having children measured is a really good idea as then parents can see early on whether their child needs some support to become more active or improve their nutrition," said Doreen.

"Once the weight goes on it is hard to lose it as you are in that habit so being measured it a good idea as you can nip it in the bud."

Parents will be receiving letters this week to inform them of their child's height and weight measurements as part of the National Child Measurement Programme.

More than 6,000 schoolchildren in Northumberland have had their weight and height measured at school as part of a drive to offer children and their families support to manage their weight.

"The programme is really good fun and Justin has made new friends through going," said Doreen. "He has grown in confidence and finds it easier to meet new people.

"I would say to other parents to give this a go as you don't know whether you will like it unless you give it a try."

Doreen says she has struggled with her weight in the past and when they got a letter from Justin's school Hirst Park Middle School promoting GAN they decided to join.

"You always worry about your children and they might have put a little bit of weight on.

"Justin didn't use to play outside like my other children and preferred playing computer games.

"We took the opportunity to join the sessions to get active and learn more about healthy eating."

Doreen and Justin have learned small ways to be active around the house such as putting a CD on for a dance or running up and down stairs.

"It has been great as it doesn't mean you have to join lots of clubs, you can make small changes. We have really enjoyed the cookery sessions as well with recipes to make at home.

"Justin makes good food choices now and he knows the difference between good and bad foods.

"He also is more active and enjoys doing fun activities. The main thing is his confidence which has really grown."

Dawn Scott, public health consultant for obesity for NHS North of Tyne, working on behalf of Northumberland Care Trust, said: "Under the Change4Life banner weight management schemes encourage families to adopt healthy lifestyles by eating a healthy diet and taking plenty of exercise.

"We also run a number of food co ops and cooking sessions to help people to eat healthily on a budget.

"Without help, overweight children will become overweight or obese adults and will be at increased risk of heart attacks, high blood pressure, diabetes and stroke."

8. Questions and answers when dealing with calls from parents

Please note - these questions should not be sent to parents or put on a website, but can be used when parents contact you for further information about the programme or their child's results letter

1. I did not request this information, why was it sent to me?

Before your child was weighed and measured, letters with opt-out slips were sent to all parents/carers. If we did not receive an opt-out slip from you to tell us that you did not want your child not to take part, your child will have been weighed and measured along with their classmates.

2. I completed the opt-out form for my child. Why were they were still measured?

We are sorry that your child was measured if you did not want them to be. Please be assured that it was performed by trained health professional in a sensitive way and importantly done in private. We will investigate what happened.

3. I don't think that my child is overweight and I find this offensive

When your son or daughter was measured, their weight and height calculations (known as BMI centile) showed that he/she is heavier than expected for a boy or girl of their height and age. It can be very difficult to tell whether a child is overweight just by looking at them, especially when their friends and peers are also of a similar size. That's why we use the measurement of weight against height to get an accurate measure.

We understand that sometimes receiving results about your child's weight may cause you concern or raise questions but we think that if we are collecting this information about your child's height and weight, then it is right to share the result with you.

The good thing is that you can make a difference by making small changes to your child's diet and activity levels. We included some information with your results letter from Change4Life that has tips on how to do this.

4. My son/daughter is only 1lb overweight! You're just panicking parents and labelling children

Everything that we do, we believe to be in the best interest of children and their wellbeing. Making parents/carers aware at an early stage is important to enable you to monitor your child's health and make the best choices about healthy eating and activities for the whole family.

5. My child has an ongoing medical condition and is receiving treatment for it. I've notified the school, so why have I received this letter?

We make is clear in the results letter that some medical conditions or treatment that a child may be receiving may mean that BMI centile is not the best way to

measure a child. We advise parents to contact their GP or other health professional who is caring for their child to discuss the results letter with them.

6. Why are you doing this programme?

The NCMP provides our area with important and useful information about the rates of child obesity in our local population and enables us to put in place programmes to support families with overweight children where they are needed.

Parents have said that they want to receive this information about their child, and that is why we started sharing results with parents after doing the measurements.

The letters can help parents make informed decisions about their children's health. Without this information, parents may be left in the dark and without the chance to change things if they want to.

7. Do you want me to share these results with my daughter/son?

We have only sent the results to you, so the decision whether to talk to your child about the result is entirely yours. Some parents/carers like to discuss the result with their child and then decide together whether to make any changes to the family's eating or activity levels while others decide to make discreet changes without telling them. There is no right or wrong answer and your approach will depend on your family and your child.

8. I'm worried that focussing on my child's weight will make him/her develop an eating disorder.

We hope this is not the case. Studies (such as those by the National Children's Bureau and the University College London) have found that most children are indifferent or unconcerned about being weighed or measured and that any dietary changes after receiving the result letter are positive changes, such as reducing foods that are high in fat or sugar. Many parents and cares see this as an opportunity to think about their family's lifestyle and whether there are changes that can be made together.

9. The leaflet mentions Change4Life. What is it and how can I sign up?

By signing up to Change4Life, you will receive information on healthy eating and getting your family more active. You can also discover what clubs, activities and fun events are happening in your local area. You can sign up to Change4Life at www.nhs.uk/change4life or by calling 0300 123 4567 (local call rates apply).