

First-Ever Global Guidelines on Child & Adolescent Obesity

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Science & Technology | Health

Why in News?

Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) released its first-ever global guidelines on the integrated management of obesity in children and adolescents.

Key Recommendations

- **Age-Specific Clinical Interventions**
 - **Children Under 10 Years (Ages 0-9)** - Strongly against anti-obesity drugs, bariatric surgical procedures (e.g., gastric bypass), or invasive weight-management devices.
 - Treatment must focus exclusively on multi-modal lifestyle programs combining structured nutrition, physical activity, and behavioral modifications.
 - **Adolescents (Ages 10-19)** - Conditionally permits approved anti-obesity drugs (GLP-1 receptor agonists) and bariatric surgery.
 - But, only in cases of severe/morbid obesity accompanied by co-morbidities (such as Type-2 diabetes, insulin resistance, or uncontrolled hypertension) where a supervised 6-month lifestyle program has failed.
- **Mental Health & Stigma Reduction** - Categorizes obesity as a **chronic, relapsing disease** driven by biological, genetic, environmental, and social determinants rather than an individual behavioral failure.
- Mandates that health systems simultaneously address psychological factors (stigma, bullying, anxiety, depression) alongside physical weight management.
- **Digital Health Interventions** - Conditionally supports caregiver-supervised digital health tools including gamified physical activity applications, exergames, and accelerometers/pedometers.
- It is to encourage movement while limiting passive, sedentary screen time.

Global Burden Shift

- According to WHO data, 170 million children and adolescents (ages 5-19) were living with obesity in 2024.
- The prevalence quadrupled from **2% in 1990 to 8% in 2024**, with the steepest growth currently occurring in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

Impact on India

- Data from the *Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS)* projects that India will be home to over 27 million obese children by 2030, accounting for **11% of the total global burden**.
- NFHS data highlights a sharp surge in overweight/obesity among under-5 children, shifting

India's public health challenge toward a dual burden of undernutrition and early-onset metabolic disorders.

Significance

- Citing an absence of long-term safety, efficacy, and safety-rebound data for GLP-1 drugs in young children, the guidelines establish strict regulatory boundaries against medicalizing childhood obesity.
- Expands prior WHO guidance (which focused primarily on prevention in under-5s) to define comprehensive, lifelong clinical care pathways for already-affected pediatric populations.
- Stresses that clinical care must be matched by structural policy interventions, such as taxing sugar-sweetened beverages, restricting junk-food marketing targeting children, and improving urban sports infrastructure.

First-Ever Global Guidelines on Child & Adolescent Obesity

Healthier children. Stronger futures.

A unified global roadmap for a healthier generation!

Why it matters?

- Rising rates**
Childhood obesity is increasing globally, affecting health and well-being.
- Long-term risks**
Linked to diabetes, heart disease, mental health issues and reduced quality of life.
- A global challenge**
Affects every country, regardless of income level.

What do the guidelines cover?

- Prevention**
Promote healthy diets, physical activity and reduced screen time.
- Early identification**
Screening and monitoring to detect risks early.
- Treatment**
Evidence-based, person-centred care for those already affected.
- Stronger systems**
Support from families, schools, healthcare and communities.

Key recommendations

- Healthy eating**
More fruits, vegetables, whole grains. Less ultra-processed food.
- Physical activity**
At least 60 minutes daily, and less screen time.
- Better sleep**
Adequate, quality sleep for healthy growth.
- Family involvement**
Positive role modelling and supportive home environments.
- Policy action**
Healthier food systems, safe spaces and supportive policies.

Who is involved?

- Governments**
Policy & regulation
- Healthcare professionals**
Care & monitoring
- Families**
Healthy homes
- Schools**
Healthy learning environments
- Communities**
Support & awareness

Healthy weight = Healthy mind = Healthy future

Because every child deserves a healthy start in life.

Reference

[The Indian Express | First ever guidelines on child & teen obesity](#)