# NHS expands use of smart scales to support severely overweight children in England



The NHS has initiated a significant rollout of "smart scales" across its specialist weight management clinics in England, a move aimed at aiding severely overweight children in embracing healthier lifestyles. This innovative technology, described as a potentially transformative tool by health officials, allows for the seamless transmission of weight data to a mobile app. This functionality enables healthcare professionals to monitor patients’ progress remotely and offer continuous support to families, an essential aspect of effective weight management.

Currently, around 350 children are benefiting from this technology, which cleverly avoids displaying specific weight numbers. Instead, the scales indicate the 'direction' of a child's weight management, offering a nuanced approach to tracking progress. The data is automatically shared with the child’s clinical team, enabling them to communicate with families through regular, tailored feedback. This setup is particularly crucial in addressing behavioural changes, which are often necessary for long-term success.

The smart scales are part of a broader initiative encompassing 15 Complications from Excess Weight (CEW) clinics, with plans to extend the programme to four additional clinics by summer. Since its inception in 2021, the CEW clinics have provided care to 4,784 children aged between two and 18, dealing with health complications associated with severe obesity. The overall aim of the NHS initiative is to enhance expert care at home, thereby decreasing the need for frequent hospital visits due to weight-related health issues such as stroke and mental health conditions.

Professor Simon Kenny, the national clinical director for children and young people at NHS England, emphasised the importance of early intervention, stating that living with excess weight can lead to severe complications across multiple organ systems. He noted, “Living with excess weight can cause problems affecting every organ system and long-term complications such as type 2 diabetes, stroke, early joint replacements and mental health difficulties." The aim, he explained, is not merely to manage weight but to foster healthier habits from a young age, thus preventing children from becoming unwell adults.

A compelling accounts comes from a 16-year-old schoolgirl named Kirsty, who described her experience at Sheffield Children’s NHS Foundation Trust CEW clinic as “the best decision I ever made.” Initially nervous, she found that the support from the clinical team significantly improved her mental health and taught her crucial lessons about nutrition. Kirsty's story reflects a broader trend documented by recent analyses showing how patients at CEW clinics often face complex challenges. For instance, nearly a quarter have a neurodevelopmental disorder, highlighting the multifaceted nature of childhood obesity.

Research presented at the European Congress on Obesity detailed the health complications these children face. Significant issues such as metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease were found in 30% of patients, with obstructive sleep apnoea and hypertension also prevalent. Furthermore, over 40% of these children come from the most deprived neighbourhoods, drawing attention to the intersection of obesity with socio-economic factors.

The NHS is responding to an urgent public health crisis. Latest figures reveal that nearly one in ten children entering their first year of school are categorised as obese, with an increase noted in the year-on-year data. This reality casts a long shadow over childhood health, with the NHS reportedly spending around £6.5 billion annually to combat obesity-related health issues across all age groups.

The prevalence of obesity in young people is not just an isolated issue but part of a concerning trend. Recent statistics indicate that hospital admissions for obese children have nearly tripled over the past decade. The expansion of NHS obesity clinics aims to counteract this trend by providing targeted support to around 3,000 children through tailored care packages that encompass diet, mental health care, and behaviour coaching.

As the NHS continues to enhance its services, the introduction of smart scales and the expansion of specialised clinics represent a proactive approach to tackling childhood obesity. Through these initiatives, the health service aims not only to manage current health challenges but also to lay down the foundations for improved future health outcomes for children across England.

### Reference Map

* Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/over-weight-children-nhs-scales-b2749796.html), [[2]](https://www.england.nhs.uk/2023/06/nhs-to-open-new-specialist-clinics-for-obese-children-and-young-people/)
* Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/over-weight-children-nhs-scales-b2749796.html)
* Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/over-weight-children-nhs-scales-b2749796.html), [[2]](https://www.england.nhs.uk/2023/06/nhs-to-open-new-specialist-clinics-for-obese-children-and-young-people/), [[7]](https://inews.co.uk/news/health/nhs-obesity-clinics-children-hospital-admissions-triple-2409970)
* Paragraph 4: [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/over-weight-children-nhs-scales-b2749796.html)
* Paragraph 5: [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/over-weight-children-nhs-scales-b2749796.html), [[3]](https://www.pulsetoday.co.uk/news/clinical-areas/obesity-and-nutrition/nhs-doubles-planned-rollout-of-childhood-obesity-clinics-in-england/)
* Paragraph 6: [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/over-weight-children-nhs-scales-b2749796.html), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-67158204.amp)
* Paragraph 7: [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/over-weight-children-nhs-scales-b2749796.html), [[5]](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/childrens-weight/national-child-measurement-programme/)
* Paragraph 8: [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/over-weight-children-nhs-scales-b2749796.html), [[4]](https://www.england.nhs.uk/2024/11/almost-one-in-ten-children-obese-in-first-year-of-school/), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-67158204.amp)
* Paragraph 9: [[3]](https://www.pulsetoday.co.uk/news/clinical-areas/obesity-and-nutrition/nhs-doubles-planned-rollout-of-childhood-obesity-clinics-in-england/), [[7]](https://inews.co.uk/news/health/nhs-obesity-clinics-children-hospital-admissions-triple-2409970)

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## Bibliography

* <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/over-weight-children-nhs-scales-b2749796.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2023/06/nhs-to-open-new-specialist-clinics-for-obese-children-and-young-people/> - In June 2023, NHS England announced plans to open 10 new specialist clinics across England to support severely obese children and young people. This initiative aims to provide intensive support to approximately 3,000 children aged between two and 18, offering tailored care packages developed with their families, including diet plans, mental health care, and coaching. The expansion brings the total number of such clinics to 30, doubling the original ambition set out in the NHS Long Term Plan. The initiative is backed by £18 million over the next two years.
* <https://www.pulsetoday.co.uk/news/clinical-areas/obesity-and-nutrition/nhs-doubles-planned-rollout-of-childhood-obesity-clinics-in-england/> - Pulse Today reported in June 2023 that the NHS is doubling its planned rollout of childhood obesity clinics in England. The expansion includes 10 new specialist clinics, bringing the total to 30, aiming to support around 3,000 obese children and young people aged between two and 18. The clinics will provide access to specialist NHS doctors, nurses, psychologists, social workers, and dietitians, offering support to lose weight, treatment for complications, and tailored care packages developed with their families, including diet plans, mental health care, and coaching.
* <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2024/11/almost-one-in-ten-children-obese-in-first-year-of-school/> - In November 2024, NHS England reported that nearly one in ten children starting their first year of school are obese, with 9.6% of reception-aged children classified as obese in 2023/24. This figure is an increase from 9.2% in the previous year but remains below the pre-pandemic level of 9.9% in 2019/20. The report also highlighted that the NHS spends around £6.5 billion annually on treating obesity-related ill health across all age groups in England and has introduced a range of innovative services to support children and families in improving their health.
* <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/childrens-weight/national-child-measurement-programme/> - The National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) is an initiative by the NHS that measures the height and weight of children in Reception (ages 4 and 5) and Year 6 (ages 10 and 11) to assess overweight and obesity levels in primary schools. The information collected helps the NHS and local councils plan and provide better health services for children. Parents receive a letter with more information before their child is measured, and the measurements are done sensitively and in private, with results not shared with teachers or other children.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/health-67158204.amp> - In October 2023, BBC News reported a slight decrease in childhood obesity rates in England. The proportion of 10 and 11-year-olds who are overweight and obese fell from 23.4% in 2021-22 to 22.7% in 2022-23, though still higher than the pre-pandemic level of 21%. For four and five-year-olds, obesity levels decreased from 10.1% in 2021-22 to 9.2% in 2022-23, below the 2018-19 and 2019-20 levels. The report also noted that children living in the most deprived areas are more likely to be obese than those in more affluent regions.
* <https://inews.co.uk/news/health/nhs-obesity-clinics-children-hospital-admissions-triple-2409970> - In October 2024, iNews reported that the NHS is opening more specialist obesity clinics for children as young as two, following a near tripling in hospital admissions for obese youngsters over the past decade. The number of obese children admitted to hospital in England rose from 3,370 in 2011/12 to 9,431 in 2021/22. The new clinics aim to provide intensive support to thousands of severely obese children and their families, with 10 new clinics set to open this year, bringing the total to 30 across England.