



## **The changing social patterning of obesity: An analysis to inform practice and policy development**

### **Summary**

- In the UK, being overweight or obese has increasingly become associated with lower socioeconomic position, and evidence suggests that such a social gradient has become established in childhood.
- The emerging socioeconomic gradient of obesity in children is of particular concern because both overweight and obese children have an increased risk of obesity in adult life, and weight management interventions among children and young adults are of limited effectiveness.
- Analysis of a range of existing datasets has largely confirmed reported trends in obesity in the UK population, including its strong social gradient.
- Levels of excess body weight appear greater among women than among men, although there is some evidence that men are 'catching up'. Levels of overweight and obesity increase with age from childhood up to age 75 years, suggesting that efforts to prevent or reduce obesity and overweight need to start early in life and continue at least until retirement age.

### **Implications for action**

- Implementation of the NICE guidance on prevention and management of obesity will need to take account of this social patterning and ensure that the interventions proposed do not further widen existing inequalities.
- Weight gain among parents may be amplifying the growth of childhood obesity through the generation of a repeating cycle. Breaking this cycle will require a range of interventions including attention to preventing excessive weight gain among young parents, during pregnancy and in early childhood.
- Inconsistencies in available datasets hinder their usefulness for research and policy analysis. An assessment of the data needed to monitor trends relevant to national policy and to intervention strategies would be of value.

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