

World Obesity Federation

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Press Release

March 2025

Majority of countries 'unprepared' for rising obesity level, experts warn

- World Obesity Federation says two-thirds of countries worldwide have none or just one of five key policies in place to address obesity
- Only 7% of countries have health systems adequately prepared
- 1.6 million premature deaths from non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cancer, heart disease and stroke caused by overweight and obesity annually - a number that outstrips road traffic fatalities
- World failing to meet target to halt rise in obesity and diabetes and reduce deaths from non-communicable diseases
- World Obesity Federation calls for "whole-of-society approach" to addressing obesity

Embargo 23.00 GMT 03.03.25

The majority of countries in the world do not have sufficient plans and policies in place to deal with rising obesity levels, researchers at the World Obesity Federation have warned.

The World Obesity Federation's 2025 Atlas, published on World Obesity Day, (4 March), projects that the total number of adults living with obesity will increase by more than 115% between 2010 and 2030, from 524 million to 1.13 billion.

The Federation is calling on governments to address obesity as a "whole-of-society" issue, by introducing policies including food labelling and taxation, by creating built environments that encourage physical activity, and by strengthening health systems to deliver people-centred obesity healthcare.

Levels of Class II obesity and above (BMI over 35 kg/m²) - currently the common threshold used for when medical treatment is recommended - are set to more than double across the globe by 2030, with 385m adults reaching a body mass index of more than 35kg m², up from 157m in 2010.

In 2021, 1.6 million deaths from non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cancer and stroke before the age of 70 were directly attributable to high BMI. By comparison, 1.2 million people died in road traffic incidents in the same year.

Meanwhile, 27 per cent (44 million) of the 161 million adult years lived with avoidable ill-health due to non-communicable diseases were attributed to high BMI. This rises to 55% of adult years living with ill-health from type 2 diabetes. The Atlas's authors conclude that overweight and obesity are driving death and ill health from the world's leading diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular diseases and diabetes.

The increases in obesity and attributable diseases are occurring most rapidly in low-and-middle income countries, which tend to be the least prepared to deal with increases in obesity levels, especially when it comes to health systems.

Sharp increases in Class II obesity and above were seen across the globe.

- Globally, the number of adults in the world with Class II obesity and above has increased by almost 150% in 20 years (2010-2030, 157m to 385m, the exact increase is 145.223%)
- Africa saw an increase of over 200% from 11.8m - 37.2m adults
- (Exact increase 215.254%)
- The Americas saw an increase of more than 100% from 63m to 136m (Exact increase is 115.873%)
- The Eastern Mediterranean region saw an increase from 21.6m to 68m adults (more than 200%) (Exact increase is 214.815%)
- Europe saw an increase of more than 50% from 41.3m - 63m adults (Exact increase is 52.5424%)
- SE Asia saw an increase of 9.3m -37.3m adults (more than 300 per cent) (Exact increase is 301.075%)
- Western Pacific saw an increase from 9.3m - 43m adults (almost 400 per cent) (Exact increase is 362.366%)

World Obesity Federation analysed the existence of five key policies for addressing obesity: Taxes on sugar-sweetened drinks, taxes on foods high in fats, saturated fats, sugar and salt, subsidies for healthier foods, restrictions on marketing food to children, and taxes and incentives to promote physical activity.

But the authors found that two thirds of countries (126 out of 194) have either none or just one of these policies in place to address rising obesity levels.

Concerningly, especially given the predicted rises in Class II obesity, 67 of 194 countries - more than one third of the world- have none or only one of eight indicators of public health system readiness in place [see Notes to Editors]. Only 13 countries had evidence of adequate health system readiness.

However, the authors note that the existence of policies does not ensure implementation, especially in resource-poor settings. Furthermore, the policy indicators measured in the Atlas only capture a snapshot of the multisectoral action needed to address obesity comprehensively

and the authors caution that changing systems requires collective action by governments and in wider society.

Simón Barquera, President of the World Obesity Federation, said today: “It’s clear that obesity is on the rise, and equally clear that many countries are unprepared to deal with what is an increasingly serious problem for populations.”

“Obesity is a serious disease in its own right and a major driver of noncommunicable diseases including cancer, heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes, with almost 4 million deaths per year attributable to obesity.

“More people die because of obesity than in road traffic accidents every year. We would be horrified if a country had no policy in place to reduce fatalities on the road, but many governments across the world have no serious plan to reduce death and illness caused by obesity.

“We need governments to take a whole-of-society approach to addressing obesity - from food labelling and taxation, a built environment that gives people the opportunity to be active, challenging stigma, and better training for the health workforce to deliver people-centred obesity care.”

On World Obesity Day 2025, the World Obesity Federation is calling for "changing systems, healthier lives", with an emphasis on the necessity of coordinating sectors and strategies to implement a holistic and sustained response to obesity.

ENDS.

Notes to Editors

Simón Barquera, President of World Obesity Federation, is available for interview.

National ‘scorecards’ detailing individual countries’ prevalence and preparedness for obesity are available on request

World Obesity Day 2025 Calls to Action

In health systems:

- Recognising obesity as a disease and establishing monitoring and surveillance systems
 - Integrating and scaling-up obesity prevention and management services within NCD programs, focusing on primary health care
 - Including access to primary, secondary and tertiary obesity services in insurance and universal health coverage packages
 - Resourcing and training the health workforce to deliver people-centred obesity care
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In food systems:

- For stronger government regulation to reduce the consumption of unhealthy foods and beverages, including:
 - o Fiscal policies such as sugar-sweetened beverages taxes
 - o Front-of-pack nutrition labelling and mandatory nutrient declarations
 - o Marketing restrictions on unhealthy products
- For actions to increase equitable access to healthy food across the life course, including:
 - o Protection, promotion and support for breastfeeding
 - o Healthy public food procurement and service policies
 - o Reformulation of food and beverage products for healthy diets

In our environments and wider society:

- Local governments to create public green spaces for active recreation and sport for people of all ages and abilities
- Transport systems to promote walking and cycling routes
- Fiscal measures to promote physical activity, for example reduced tax on sporting goods and subsidies for extracurricular physical activity programmes.
- Employers to proactively address stigma around obesity and prioritize the health and wellbeing of all the workforce
- Media to play an active role in addressing stigma and changing the narrative around obesity

Public Health System Readiness Indicators

National Guidelines/standards for:	National audit/survey in the last five years on:
Management of high BMI: Existence of evidence-based national guidelines/protocols/standards for the management of overweight/obesity	Overweight and obesity: Evidence of a recent, national adult risk factor survey covering overweight and obesity
Physical activity: Existence of evidence-based national guidelines for physical activity	Unhealthy diet: Evidence of a recent national adult risk factor survey covering unhealthy diet
Physical inactivity: Existence of evidence-based national guidelines/protocols/standards for the management of physical inactivity	Physical inactivity: Evidence of a recent national adult risk factor survey covering physical inactivity
NCD management in primary care: Existence of evidence-based national	STEPS or health examination: Evidence of a STEPwise approach to NCD risk factor

guidelines/protocols/standards in the management of physical inactivity	surveillance (STEPS) survey or a comprehensive health examination survey every five years
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About The World Obesity Federation

The **World Obesity Federation (World Obesity)** is the only global organisation focused exclusively on obesity.

World Obesity represents stakeholders in high-, medium- and low-income countries, including experts, advocates, patients and practitioners. It is a lead partner to global agencies on obesity, including the **World Health Organization (WHO)** – with which it has formal consultative status. The World Obesity Federation takes a holistic view of obesity from cause and prevention to treatment. www.worldobesity.org

About World Obesity Day

World Obesity Day is a unified day of action that calls for a cohesive, cross-sector response to the obesity crisis. It takes place on 4 March and is convened by the **World Obesity Federation** in collaboration with its global members.

Hundreds of individuals, organisations and alliances contribute to World Obesity Day every year, engaging hundreds of thousands of people across the world. www.worldobesityday.org

World Obesity Federation strongly encourages journalists and editors to use people-first language and respectful images when reporting on obesity and overweight. For more information please visit:

<https://www.worldobesity.org/downloads/healthy-voices-downloads/HV-Language-guidelines.pdf>

- Additional data and statistics can be found on the Global Obesity Observatory, an online, interactive database collating information about the prevalence and epidemiology of obesity, maintained by the World Obesity Federation. <https://data.worldobesity.org/>
- Social: #WorldObesityAtlas #WOD2024 #WorldObesityDay
- Access to images: The World Obesity Federation Image Bank is a gallery of free-to-use images that are accurate, non-biased and respectful. www.worldobesity.org/resources/image-bank
- In this Atlas, the term ‘high BMI’ includes overweight (BMI 25-30 kg/m²) & obesity (BMI 30+kg/m²)