

India ranks second globally for children who are overweight and living with obesity: report

India stood second only to China in the number of children with high BMI: 41 million high BMI; 14 million obesity, as per the World Obesity Atlas 2026

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THE HINDU BUREAU



The rise in childhood obesity is expected to have serious health consequences. Image | Photo Credit: puhimec

Nearly 15 million children aged five to nine years and more than 26 million children aged 10 to 19 years in India were **overweight or obese** in 2025, according to the World Obesity Atlas 2026 released on World Obesity Day, which falls on March 4.

The World Obesity Federation, a global organisation focused on obesity warned that the world was set to miss the 2025 global target to halve the rise in childhood obesity. Though the deadline is now being extended to 2030, most countries remain off track, and India is no exception, it said, in a press release.

Over 200 million school-age children aged five to 19 living with overweight and obesity are concentrated in just 10 countries across the world. By the end of 2025, eight countries were projected to have more than 10 million children with high Body Mass Index (BMI). China, India and the United States each had over 10 million children living with obesity. India stood second only to China in the number of children with high BMI (41 million high BMI; 14 million obesity). China led the two categories with 62 million children with high BMI and 33 million with only obesity. The U.S. had 27 million children with high BMI and 13 million with obesity.

Health consequences

This rise in childhood obesity is expected to have serious health consequences. The Atlas pointed out that in India, the number of children aged five to 19 with disease indicators linked to high BMI is projected to rise substantially from 2025 to 2040. Cases of BMI-related hypertension are expected to rise from 2.99 million to 4.21 million; hyperglycaemia from 1.39 million to 1.91 million; high triglycerides from 4.39 million to 6.07 million; and metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD) previously known as Nonalcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD) from 8.39 million to 11.88 million, the release said.

The report also highlighted several preventable risk factors across different age groups in the country. It noted that 74% of adolescents aged 11 to 17 failed to meet recommended physical activity levels, while only 35.5% of school-age children (primary and secondary) receive school meals. Nearly 32.6% of infants aged one to five months experience sub-optimal breastfeeding. Among women aged 15 to 49, 13.4% have high BMI and 4.2% live with Type 2 diabetes. Children aged six to 10 years consumed sugary drinks, averaging up to 50 ml per day.

Global scenario

The Atlas found that more than one in five (20.7%) children aged five to 19 worldwide are living with obesity and are overweight. This was an increase from 14.6% in 2010. The Federation predicts that by 2040, a total of 507 million children will be living with obesity or be overweight.

In fact, childhood obesity and being overweight can lead to many of the same health conditions seen in adults, including hypertension and cardiovascular disease. By 2040, it is estimated that more than 57 million children will show early signs of cardiovascular disease (high triglycerides), while over 43 million will show signs of hypertension.

Government action needed

There is an emphasis on governments to act immediately. Johanna Ralston, chief executive of the World Obesity Federation, said, “The increase in childhood obesity worldwide shows we have failed to take seriously a disease that affects one in five children. Governments urgently need to step up prevention and management efforts for children living with overweight and obesity, and ensure that they receive the care they need.”

The Federation has called for strong action to reverse current trends, including taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages, restrictions on marketing to children (including digital platforms), implementation of global physical activity recommendations for children, protection of breastfeeding, healthier school food standards, and integration of prevention and care into primary health systems, according to the release.

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