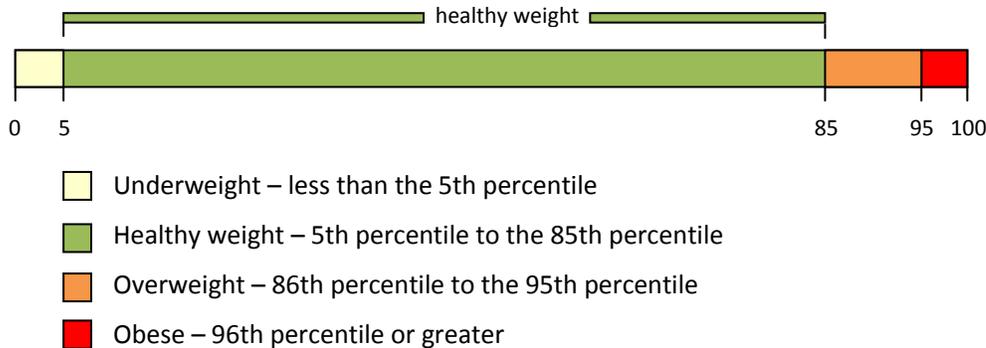


## Frequently Asked Questions about Body Mass Index (BMI) Screening

### What is BMI?

BMI stands for Body Mass Index. Body Mass Index is a number calculated from a child's weight and height. It is a way of checking to see if your child has a healthy weight. The results of the BMI screening are given as a "percentile," and the results compare your child's height and weight those of other children of your child's age and sex. In general, the higher the BMI, the more fat there is in the body.

Below are examples of percentiles for BMI.



### Why are schools doing BMI screenings?

Screening for student health issues has been viewed as an important part of school health services. Schools regularly screen students for hearing, vision and other physical issues, such as scoliosis. Some public schools have been measuring the height and weight of students for many years as part of yearly growth screening. Recently, a law was passed that requires schools to use this information to calculate body mass index (BMI) for students in kindergarten, third grade, fifth grade and ninth grade. As with other screenings, the intent of the BMI check is to be able to advise parents or guardians if a screening suggests it could be in their child's best interest to be evaluated by a health care provider. Parents will be provided information about their child's screening results and with ideas about how to help their child maintain or establish healthy lifestyle habits. The law requires schools to share the BMI results with children's parents or guardians in a way that keeps the results private.

In addition to the benefits of BMI screenings for families and children, the districts and schools can use information collected during the screenings to determine what types of programs are needed to create or support a healthier school environment and community.

### How will the school protect my child's results, so that my child is not embarrassed or teased or by other students?

Schools understand the importance of privacy. Similar health screenings, such as hearing and vision tests, have been done for many years, and schools always keep those results private. The law requires that no other students or school staff be present when your child's weight and height are measured. Your child's school will mail BMI screening results to you, or the school will discuss these results with you in private meetings. The law says that schools may share students' screening results *only* with their parents or guardians.

### Why is BMI screening important to children and families?

BMI is a screening tool that helps identify children who may be at risk for weight problems. A BMI that places a child below the 5th percentile may mean that the child is not growing well. It also may mean that the child is at risk of having an eating disorder. Children with BMIs that place them above the 85th percentile are considered overweight. Those with BMIs that place them above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile are considered obese. Children with a

body mass index that places them in the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile or above are at risk for adult diseases such as type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure. If your child's BMI is not in the healthy range, you should have your child examined by a physician who can conduct a complete evaluation.

### **Should I talk to my doctor or nurse about the results?**

Because the BMI is just one test, it is important to follow up with a complete evaluation from a physician if your child's BMI is not in the healthy weight range. Doctors and other health care professionals are the best people to determine whether your child or adolescent's weight is healthy, and they can help check for medical problems that can cause unhealthy weight. If your doctor determines that your child is overweight or obese, the doctor can help develop a weight-loss strategy that includes exercise and changes in diet. If your child's BMI concerns you or is higher than you thought, you should talk with your child's doctor or nurse as soon as possible.

### **What can I do to help my child be healthier?**

The first place to start is with your doctor. Because all children are different, you should discuss possible changes in nutrition and physical activity with a qualified health-care professional. You can talk with your child's doctor about his or her growth, nutrition, activity level, sleep and fluid intake – the things that most affect your child's health.

An easy way to begin is to help your child eat three balanced meals a day. These meals should include fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and fish, and low-fat or nonfat milk. You should limit foods that are high in sugar and fat and low in nutritional value. Also, encourage your child to be active for at least an hour each day, and limit to less than two hours daily the amount of time he or she spends watching TV and playing on the computer. You can support your school's efforts to increase physical activity during the school day and provide healthy food options. You also can work with community leaders and local organizations to make sure your neighborhood offers healthy food and safe, affordable places to be physically active.

### **How should I talk with my child about his or her results?**

It is good to start by reminding your child that everyone in your family is responsible for being healthy, and your child is not alone. You might say that the BMI screening gives you and your child information about how he or she is growing. Instead of talking about weight, you can talk about ways to stay healthy and active.

If you and your child have talked about weight and health before, either at home or in the doctor's office, you can remind your child and other family members how this fits with what you already have discussed. You also can ask your child if he or she has any questions about the BMI screening results. Encouraging your child to share feelings about his or her growing, changing body will let your child know it is okay to talk about these things with you.

### **What other information is available to help me?**

Again, talk to your child's doctor or school nurse, and visit the U.S. government website <http://www.letsmove.gov> for more ideas on how to eat better and move more.

### **Why is BMI screening important to public health officials?**

For each school, BMI results from individual children will be combined into a summary of how many children are in each weight category. Each school will send its summary to the Ohio Department of Health (ODH). *These summaries will **not** show results for any individual child.* Only a child's parents or guardians will know that child's results. The summary will help ODH determine how children's BMIs are changing over time in counties throughout the state. It is important for ODH to have accurate community-level information about this to plan its public health and prevention programs.