



Department of Child Health, Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, Champs Fleurs, Trinidad and Tobago  
Email address: thepaediatricsociety.tt@gmail.com

19<sup>th</sup> July 2023

### **PSTT supports the Ministry of Health efforts to address childhood obesity in Trinidad and Tobago**

The Paediatric Society of Trinidad and Tobago (PSTT) notes with great enthusiasm the ongoing efforts of the Ministry of Health led by the Honorable Minister of Health, Mr. Terrance Deyalsingh, to address the challenge of obesity and associated NCD burden in Trinidad and Tobago.

Our members have been noting with growing alarm the increased numbers of overweight and obese children presenting to our hospital and private clinics. There has also been a significant increase in childhood type 2 diabetes and other co-morbidities traditionally associated with the adult population. Not only are these children experiencing more ill-health, but these children will become adults with high rates of NCDs who are more prone to depression, anxiety, and poor immune systems.

Obesity has been classified as a worldwide epidemic by the WHO in 2017, when the death of 4 million persons worldwide was directly attributed to obesity. It was noted that the vast majority of overweight and obese children live in developing countries with a more than 30% higher incidence than their counterparts in developed states.

In 2021 CARPHA reported that the Caribbean had some of the highest rates of obesity in the Americas with an alarming increase in prevalence levels in children aged 5-9. In 2020 Professor Teelucksingh et al. found that Trinidad and Tobago ranked 5th in the Caribbean. The WHO recently published that we rank 8th worldwide with an obesity rate of 14% in those less than 5-year-old. This translates into a 4-fold increase in childhood obesity rates over the last 2 decades. This is an alarming rate of increase and if we do not intervene now the situation will only worsen.

We note that this increase in the numbers of overweight children has correlated with reduced physical activity, increased screen time and unhealthy and unbalanced diets. Families spend less time at home with increased hours in traffic, parents working longer hours and children spending more hours in lessons. Many schools have also removed physical education from their timetables as children approach examination classes to devote more hours to academic achievement. Parents are often left with few options in terms of quick affordable fast food to sustain their families. Unfortunately, these are the foods that are high in calories, fat, salt and sugar, all ingredients of an unhealthy, unbalanced diet.

The members of the PSTT therefore support all measures to arrest this trend nationally. We congratulate and support the Minister's ongoing discussions with the heads of the Fast-Food Chains and Restaurants and the Beverage Industry in finding strategies to make their offerings to the public more balanced.



Department of Child Health, Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, Champs Fleurs, Trinidad and Tobago  
Email address: [thepaediaticsociety.tt@gmail.com](mailto:thepaediaticsociety.tt@gmail.com)

In addition to healthier fast-food options, ongoing and robust public discussion, and education about obesity and NCD reduction is necessary. We also support all strategies to encourage more childhood physical activity and outdoor play starting with returning physical education to all classes in our schools and making safe outdoor spaces available in communities.

The members of the PSTT continue to be available to lend our expertise and manpower to this important cause. We hope that these efforts will stem this tide of childhood obesity before it is too late. Let us all work together to achieve a healthier population in Trinidad and Tobago.

END