

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**NHS NORTH SOMERSET LAUNCHES CHILD NUTRITION GUIDELINES**

A multi-agency partnership between NHS North Somerset, North Somerset Council and Weston Area Health Trust today launches a guide to mother and child nutrition in a bid to reduce the numbers of overweight children considered obese when they start school.

Director of Public Health for North Somerset Becky Pollard told an audience of health and early years professionals, community nurses and childminders at the guide's Clevedon launch), that the new guidelines would provide consistent advice and information to help reduce obesity in both children and pregnant women.

The publication will be distributed to 300 nursery and early years settings, accredited childminders, midwives, health visitors and GP surgeries across North Somerset and will also be available for downloading via North Somerset Council website's Family Information Service portal for families.

Explained Karin Dixon, NHS North Somerset Senior Health Improvement Specialist: "In North Somerset 13% of 4 & 5 year olds are overweight while 9% are obese.

These guidelines aim to provide the guidance and information mothers and carers for young children need to ensure that they receive the best possible start in life.”

Obesity rates in North Somerset among children of reception age (4-5) and Year 6 (10-11), are significantly higher in children from the most deprived areas, than among children from more affluent localities – a gap which has not changed in three years.

Added Becky Pollard: “An obese child has a significantly increased chance of becoming an obese adult and that child is also likely to suffer poor health during childhood AND in later life. It is equally important that pregnant women eat healthily. Obesity in pregnancy is also associated with increased risk of complications for both mothers and babies, including an increased chance of abnormalities, still births and neonatal death.”

NHS North Somerset also wants to improve breastfeeding rates across the patch. Seventy seven percent of women in North Somerset start breastfeeding but many stop soon afterwards. By the time they receive their 6-8 week health check, only 47% of babies are still being breastfed.

Added Becky Pollard; “Breastfeeding is the safest and best way to feed babies up to six months old as it prevents a wide range of illnesses and cancers.”

One of the key underlying messages within the guidelines is that by creating a positive relationship with food in their early years, children are much more likely to develop – and maintain – healthy eating patterns. They are based on those developed late last year by NHS Bristol and the North Somerset publication will ensure that there is consistency in the advice offered to mothers-to-be about their own and their child’s nutrition,

Added Karin Dixon: “Most new mothers from North Somerset give birth in Bristol and we want to ensure that the messages they are given are consistent AND reflect both best practice and national guidelines. We hope they will support all health and early years practitioners working with young mothers and young children to provide the right advice and instil in the children the eating habits that will ensure they are healthy and happy for a lifetime.”

**-ENDS-**

**Notes to Editors**

- NHS North Somerset is the local Primary Care Trust for North Somerset. The trust was established in April 2002 to ensure the provision of the highest quality healthcare services to the residents of North Somerset. It was recently assessed as one of the most improved PCTs in England by the Care Quality Commission.

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