



BMI 5-9T: What it's about

- > It's aimed at tackling obesity among schoolchildren.
- > The target group are pupils aged five to nine.
- > BMI checks will be done twice annually from the 2022/2023 school academic year, which starts in March.
- > The first BMI 5-9T test will be carried out in the third month after the start of the schooling session.
- > The second test will be conducted five months after the first test.
- > Its implementation was issued in a circular signed by Education director-general Datin Sri Nor Zamani Abdol Hamid.
- > The programme will help pupils realise the importance of having an ideal body composition, doing exercises on a regular basis and practising a healthy diet for their well-being.
- > It is compulsory for preschool and level one pupils in national primary schools, government and private agencies, as well as private schools.
- > It is compulsory for special needs pupils, except those who need maximum support.
- > Level one pupils will do it during Physical and Health Education, and during integrated learning and outdoor activities for preschoolers.
- > The recording and measuring of the BMI must be done manually in the BMI 5-9T form and online through the ministry's Integrated Assessment Management System (SPPB).

Source: Education director-general Datin Sri Nor Zamani Abdol Hamid

TheStargraphics

are important.

"There are many aspects to leading a healthy lifestyle. Simply monitoring one's weight alone is not enough.

"We cannot just tell pupils to reduce their weight based on their BMIs without providing them with an environment that's conducive to do it."

Dr Hazreen and his team are conducting an ongoing study, titled "Malaysian Health and Adolescents Longitudinal Research Team", on 13-year-olds who had their blood samples, diet practices and physical activity levels measured.

Involving 1,361 Form One students, their health status was monitored until they turned 17.

The team was led by Dr Hazreen as the principal investigator.

Upon examination and the subsequent follow-ups, he found that 25% of the students surveyed were obese and overweight and that about 13% of overweight students maintained their weight until they were 17.

This shows that educating children early on about maintaining a healthy lifestyle until they complete their secondary education is vital.

Only then, he said, will they feel empowered to make a change.

"Overweight children are at a higher risk of contracting non-communicable diseases like diabetes.

"The number of younger people developing non-communicable diseases, according to the Health Ministry's national health and morbidity surveys, has increased. We have to do more.

"Having said this, it doesn't mean that an overweight child will definitely be diagnosed with diabetes but it's crucial to take action now while the person is still young to save him or her from contracting any diseases later on in life."

Having the right knowledge, being willing to try different options and having more healthy food choices are other important factors that can create a healthy domino effect.

While he agreed that the recent increase in prices of vegetables and poultry may make it harder to eat healthy, Dr Hazreen suggested buying locally produced groceries as a more affordable and nutritious alternative.

"Why do we always buy healthy food as defined by the Western culture, such as salads and quinoa, instead of buying local produce which have extremely high nutritional value and may even be cheaper?"

"Local foods like pegaga and pucuk ubi have very high nutrients and can be planted in our homes.

"Instead of buying imported fruits, why not go for locally pro-

duced ones like papayas and guavas? Guavas have richer Vitamin C than oranges," he said.

Beware of body shaming

Developing best practice recommendations in tackling obesity among schoolchildren, said counselor Bawany Chinapan, should be based on a systematic approach.

Such recommendations must be developed in accordance with critically appraised research findings.

Biological, cultural, environmental, socioeconomic and community factors, lifestyle, and living conditions should be considered in drawing up long-term solutions.

Commenting on the BMI 5-9T programme, Bawany, who is a senior lecturer at HELP University, cautioned that teachers taking the BMI measurements must be mindful of making seemingly innocuous phrases that can cause a deep psychological impact on children.

Phrases like "healthy body composition" should be used instead of "ideal body composition", she suggested.

"It's important how a statement is phrased and what words are used as these can influence how a child views his or her peers.

"We need to address childhood obesity holistically instead of targeting obese individuals as this may be detrimental to their psychological well-being.

"Some may be more prone to mental health issues in later years," said Bawany.

Citing a study carried out in Singapore during the implementation of the Trim and Fit programme in the country's schools between 1992 and 2007 as an example, she said the study which targeted child obesity left psychological effects on the students as it gave rise to eating disorders.

"Children can feel sidelined, and lose their self-esteem and self-confidence if targeted.

"So any programme targeting obesity among children must be done carefully to prevent them from feeling stigmatised and developing body image issues later in life."

Body weight or size, which comes with a set of stigmas, stressed Dr Tee, can potentially cause psychological distress for pupils.

While Dr Tee emphasised the importance of having nutritionists involved to ensure proper implementation, National Union of the Teaching Profession secretary-general Wang Heng Suan said measuring pupils' BMIs is not new to teachers.

Wang said this has always been part of their administrative tasks.

"We've been measuring the BMIs of students from Year One to Form Five for years. It is just that the recently announced BMI 5-9T programme is more targeted at a particular age group."

Education in 2022

January

The start of the 2021/2022 school session (third term)

Students returned to school starting Jan 9 after almost two years of mostly virtual education necessitated by the series of Covid-19-triggered lockdowns.

The Education Ministry has allowed students, whose old uniforms no longer fit, to wear their own clothes, as long as the attire is proper and neat.

While some students began returning to classrooms beginning in November last year, not all returned for face-to-face lessons then as the ministry only permitted half of a class to be in school while the other half had to continue with virtual lessons using a weekly rotation model.

Parents can opt not to send their children to school but they must give a letter to the school explaining their reasons. Schools had been told not to take disciplinary action or issue warning letters to these students.

A list of schools allowed to reopen for the third term of 2021/2022 following the recent floods would be announced every Wednesday. Education institutions affected by floods or being used as temporary evacuation centres (PPS) will only operate once they are ready. There are 10 PPS as of Jan 12.

Primary pupils to self-test for Covid-19

To ensure that the session will go on smoothly and safely, pupils were allowed to do their own self-testing for Covid-19. Weekly, 10% of pupils would be randomly selected to do the tests at home. Self-test kits will be provided by schools.

Free textbooks for flood victims

Replacement school textbooks for those that were lost or spoilt in the floods were sent to schools. A total of 263,662 textbooks were spoilt as a result of the floods, affecting 14,422 students nationwide as of Jan 7.

Budget 2022

Starting this year, more digitalisation initiatives in education are expected. Top of the list is intensifying efforts to spread the National Digital Network (Jendela) meant to increase broadband access to Keluarga Malaysia. The government has allocated RM700mil to continue digital connectivity efforts in 47 industrial areas and 630 schools, especially in rural areas. And 5G services will be expanded to 36% of high-density areas including major cities in Johor, Selangor, Penang, Sabah and Sarawak. With an allocation of RM52.6bil for

technical and vocational education and training (TVET), the ecosystem to produce future-ready talent who can meet industry demands locally and globally is expected to improve.

Starting tomorrow (Jan 17), the ministry will be distributing RM150 to students

from households with an income of RM3,000 and below

The early school aid (BAP) initiative will benefit three million school students. It will involve pupils who will be entering Year Two in the coming 2022/2023 school year, up till Form Five students, and will be distributed to pupils who will be entering Year One in the new academic year after their school registration process is completed.

Those in Year One until Form Four in the current 2021/2022 academic year who are from households with an income of RM3,000 and less, too, will be eligible to receive the aid. It will be distributed via cash or will be banked into the recipient's bank account, with cash handouts carried out in schools based on the National Security Council's and Health Ministry's standard operating procedures.

February

SK Assumption to close

The iconic school in Butterworth, Penang, is expected to shutter late February. SK Assumption was established as a missionary school in 1933 on Jalan New Ferry. It was later relocated by a developer to the present place in Bagan Dalam. The almost 90-year-old school's 55 pupils may be transferred to other schools as the landowner, who is a developer, wants the property back.

March

New academic year starts March 21

The 2021 academic year was extended to January and February 2022 to allow students to catch up and ensure they are ready to move on to the next level of their education. This meant that the 2022 academic year would only begin in March and be known as the 2022/2023 academic year.

Year Six pupils (as of 2021) would remain in primary school and only begin Form One in March while Year One students would begin their academic life in March, for the first time in the country's education system history. The year-end holidays remain from Dec 10 to 31.

The BMI 5-9T programme kicks off

Schools to measure the body mass indices (BMIs) of pupils aged between five and nine when the new school year starts.

"WELL-BALANCED meals not only keep our children active and focused during the day, but also prevent problems like constipation. I prepare balanced meals in ways my son would enjoy. I try not to cook only one type of dish, such as curries, on a daily basis. I try Western, Chinese and even a fusion of cuisines to give him a variety and to prevent him from getting bored with food. For instance, if he wants a burger, I will make it at home from scratch with fresh and healthy ingredients. This is to avoid giving him junk food."

Mother-of-one Suvitha Rajasingam



"I FEEL energetic eating the food I pack to school, which includes nasi goreng and mee goreng. My mother makes them with very little oil and plenty of vegetables. It gives me the boost to continue focusing during my lessons after recess. I pack food to school mainly because the canteen food tastes very bland."

SK Convent Jalan Peel, Kuala Lumpur, Year Three pupil Ardina Roslan