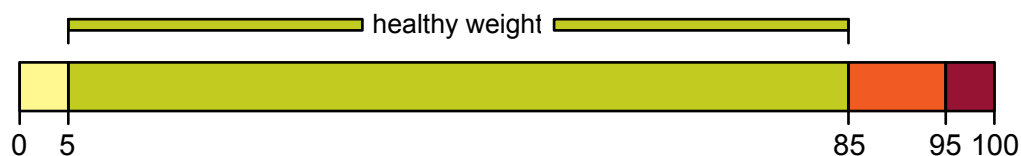


## Frequently Asked Questions About Body Mass Index (BMI) Screening

- **What is BMI?**

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

Below are examples of percentiles for BMI.



- Underweight – less than the 5th percentile
- Healthy weight – 5th percentile to less than the 85th percentile
- Overweight – 85th percentile to less than the 95th percentile
- Obese – 95th percentile or greater

- **Why are schools doing BMI screening?**

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) wants to help all people in Massachusetts be healthy and part of that is maintaining a healthy weight. People who are overweight or obese can have serious health problems. There can also be serious problems for people who are underweight. Parents who have information about their children's BMI and ideas about how to help their children with healthy living can make sure their kids are at a healthy weight. Community leaders who have information about how many children in their community are in each weight range can work with parents, school officials, after school programs and many others, to come up with ideas to help even more children get into a healthier weight range.

Public schools have been measuring the height and weight of students for many years as part of yearly growth screening. Recently, the Department of Public Health (DPH) passed a law that requires schools to use this information to calculate BMI for students in grades 1, 4, 7, and 10. It also requires schools to share the BMI results with the child's parents or guardians in a way that keeps the results private.

- **Why doesn't the law require screenings every year?**

Grades 1, 4, 7 and 10 were chosen because of the growth that happens in those age groups. Schools can do BMI screenings in more grades if they would like. The law only says that BMI screening must happen in at least those four grades.

- 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 BMI category. Each school's summary will be sent to DPH -- *they will **not** have any results for an individual child.* No one but a child's parents or guardians will know his or her results. The summary results will help DPH follow how children's BMIs in specific communities and throughout the state are changing over time. It is important for DPH to have accurate community-level information about this to plan its public health and prevention programs.
- Why is BMI screening important to children and families?**  
 BMI is way to detect possible weight problems for children. A BMI below 5<sup>th</sup> percentile may mean that a child is not growing well or that he or she may be at risk for an eating disorder. Children with a BMI above 85<sup>th</sup> percentile are overweight. Those above 95<sup>th</sup> percentile are obese. Overweight or obese kids are more likely to be overweight adults. This puts them at risk for a number of health problems like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke.
- How will the school protect my child's results so they are not teased or embarrassed by other students?**  
 Schools have been measuring heights and weights for many years and are very good at keeping the results private. Results will be mailed to parents or guardians or discussed at an in-person meeting. The new law requires schools to make sure the results are not shared with anyone else.
- Should I talk to my doctor or nurse about the results?**  
 It is always good to talk with your child's doctor or nurse about information like this. Your doctor may have talked with you about your child's weight before, but you can use these screening results to talk with them again. If your child's BMI concerns or surprises you, you should talk with your child's doctor or nurse before your next well child visit, which may not be for awhile.
- Is it possible that a child with a high BMI isn't overweight?**  
 Many things can affect BMI, like family history and amount of muscle. BMI cannot tell a difference between muscle and fat, so if a child is very athletic and has a lot of muscle, his or her BMI can be high, even though he or she is not overweight. Your child's doctor or nurse can help you understand what your child's BMI screening results mean for him or her.
- What can I do to help my child be healthier?** You can talk with your child's doctor about his or her BMI. You can also help your child eat 3 balanced meals a day. These meals should include fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and fish, and low-fat or non-fat milk. You should limit foods high in sugar and fat. For example, avoid soda and other foods that have lots of calories but no nutritional value.

In addition, you should encourage your children to be active for at least an hour each day and limit how much time they spend watching TV or 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 can also work with other community leaders and local organizations to make sure healthy food and safe, affordable places to be physically active are available in your neighborhood.

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

You can start by saying that the BMI screening gives you and your child information about how he or she is growing. Rather than talking about BMI, you can talk about ways to stay healthy and active.

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

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

Talk to your child's doctor or school nurse, and visit the Mass In Motion website ([www.mass.gov/MassInMotion](http://www.mass.gov/MassInMotion)) for more ideas on how to eat better and move more.