Childhood obesity a major public health crisis today

On World Obesity Day, awareness needs to be created on the fact that small steps at home and school can prevent obesity in children

New Delhi, 25 October 2017: Statistics indicate that India has the second highest number of obese children in the world after China. About 14.4 million children in the country are overweight as per findings. Obesity is the leading cause of many health problems and globally, about 2 billion children and adults suffer from such issues. The rate of increase in obesity among children today is alarmingly high when compared to adults, indicates the IMA.

Childhood obesity can be identified by measuring the Body Mass Index or BMI. Children with a BMI in the range of 85% to 95% are classified as being obese. Overweight and obese children are likely to stay so way into their adulthood. They also stand the chance of developing noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases at a relatively younger age.

Speaking about this, Padma Shri Awardee Dr K K Aggarwal, National President Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr RN Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement, said, "Childhood obesity is increasing worldwide at an alarming pace. India has not been spared either. The prevalence of overweight and obesity in children is steadily increasing. A multifactorial disorder, unhealthy diet – eating foods high in fats, sugar and salt (junk food, processed food) and a sedentary lifestyle contribute significantly to this escalating epidemic. Today, TV, internet, computer and mobile games have taken precedence over outdoor sports. Childhood obesity is well-recognized as a precursor to obesity in adulthood. Most obese children grow up to be obese adults. Overweight and obesity in childhood also predispose children to other lifestyle disorders such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, dyslipidemia, metabolic syndrome later in life. Hence, there is an urgent need to prevent and control obesity in children.”

Obese children and adolescents are more prone to bone and joint problems, sleep apnea, and social and psychological problems such as stigmatization and poor self-esteem.

Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, “It is important to start inculcating good nutritional habits from the beginning in children. Ensuring enough physical activity right from an early age is an equally
important aspect of every child's growth. Prevention of lifestyle diseases should start early. Schools can help in shaping the lives of students and have a very important role to play in the battle against childhood obesity. Healthy habits in childhood lay a foundation for a healthier adulthood. The IMA’s Aao School Chalein programme aims at this and more.”

Here are some tips that parents can follow at home to tackle obesity and unhealthy habits in children.

- Encourage healthy eating habits right at the onset.
- Try making favorite dishes healthier. Few changes can make even snacks healthier.
- Avoid tempting children with calorie-rich food. It is okay to treat them but in moderation and by limiting high-fat and high-sugar or salty snacks.
- Make kids understand the importance of being physically active.
- Lead by example. Indulge in at least 60 minutes of moderate to intense physical activity every day.
- Reduce sedentary time. While reading is a good option, too much of screen time is not.
- Replace screen time with the outdoors and fun activities to keep children engaged.

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About IMA: Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2,60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

For further information please contact:
Sanjeev Khanna - 9871079105
Md Adib Ahmad – 9873716235
mediaimahq@gmail.com
IMA Public & Media Advocacy Cell