

M'sia has overweight prevalence of 44.2 pct over other SEA nations

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"By the middle of the year, we hope to go down to the ground and do a pre-intervention assessment before starting the ToyBox Malaysia Intervention Programme. The programme is for six months, with a focus on four components of drinking, physical activity, snacking and sedentary behaviour.

"After six months, we will go back to the preschools and do an outcome measurement to see if the intervention is effective or not. We will share the findings later," she said.

Dr Poh pointed out that Malaysia has an overweight prevalence of 44.2 per cent over other Southeast Asian countries.

"We always see news about Malaysia being among the most overweight countries, either in Southeast Asia or Asia. Intervention at adulthood is often not effective, which is why it is important to start the intervention from preschool level. This is the time when children are able to absorb good values and good habits, which hopefully they will bring to adulthood.



(From fifth left) Fatimah and Assistant Minister for Early Childhood Education and Family Development Sharifah Hasidah Sayeed Aman Ghazali are seen during a photo call with the ToyBox team. Dr Poh is at third right, while Dr Gibson is at third left. — Photo by Jeffery Mostapa

"The feasibility study will show whether the ToyBox model can be adapted for Malaysia, as our food, weather and culture are different," she said.

The study is a collaboration between UKM, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas), as well as the United Kingdom's Roehampton University and

Durham University.

Meanwhile, Fatimah said obesity must be given due attention because it relates to non-communicable diseases, such as

diabetes and hypertension, in not only adults but children.

"We know that obesity is a problem happening in Malaysia as well as our state. Any steps that are effective in reducing obesity in children will be much welcomed. Starting with a feasibility study, if the approach is effective, then we will extend it to other preschools or kindergartens in the state, not just those under Kemas.

"The conceptual framework is very simple. It is about the food and the activities of the children, and it engages the children, teachers, parents and the community. We are not expecting a big change within six months of the study, but we hope to change the behaviours and habits," she said.

Among those present during the courtesy call were principal investigator Dr Leigh Gibson from the Roehampton University Psychology Department, Roehampton University Developmental Psychopathology professor Dr Cecilia Essau, and Unimas Medicine and Health Sciences associate professor Dr Cheah Whye Lian.