Children under five years of age

- stunted for age (percentage)
- underweight for age (percentage)
- overweight for age (percentage)

Rationale for use

All three indicators measure growth in young children. Child growth is internationally recognized as an important public health indicator for monitoring nutritional status and health in populations. In addition, children who suffer from growth retardation as a result of poor diets and/or recurrent infections tend to have greater risks of illness and death.

Definition

Percentage of children stunted describes how many children under five years have a height-for-age below minus two standard deviations of the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS)/WHO reference median.

Percentage of children underweight describes how many children under five years have a weight-for-age below minus two standard deviations of the NCHS/WHO reference median.

Percentage of children overweight describes how many children under five years have a weight-for-height above two standard deviations of the NCHS/WHO reference median.

Associated terms

Severely underweight or stunting is defined as below minus three standard deviations of the weight-for-age or height-for-age NCHS/WHO reference median.

Data sources

National household surveys, sub-national nutritional surveys and national nutrition surveillance systems.

Methods of estimation

Empirical values are used. Several countries have limited data for recent years and current estimations are made using models that make projections based on past trends.

Disaggregation

By sex, age, and location (urban/rural, major regions/provinces)

References

Database

- WHO Global Database on Child Growth and Malnutrition. (http://www.who.int/nutgrowthdb)

Comments

Anthropometric values are compared across individuals or populations in relation to a set of reference values. The choice of the reference population has a significant impact on the proportion of children identified as being under-nourished and/or over-nourished. Since the late 1970s, WHO has recommended the NCHS/WHO international reference population, for the comparison of child growth data. An improved international growth reference for young children is expected to be available by April 27th, 2006.