



Health Policy Snapshot

Childhood Obesity

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ISSUE BRIEF

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Declining childhood obesity rates—where are we seeing signs of progress?

Takeaways:

- Some cities, counties, and states throughout the country have reported declines in their childhood obesity rates.
- The places that are reporting declines are those that are taking comprehensive action to address the childhood obesity epidemic.
- Progress to reduce racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in obesity rates has been more limited.

Overview

In recent years, the national childhood obesity rate has leveled off. However, reports from across the country confirm that childhood obesity rates have declined in some cities, counties, and states. This brief presents data from those reports and summarizes resources that document their efforts to address the epidemic.

SIGNS OF PROGRESS

California, Mississippi, New Mexico, and West Virginia have documented statewide declines in childhood obesity rates among various populations. Recent reports also confirm that childhood obesity rates have declined in Eastern Massachusetts and some cities and counties, including Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; New York City; Kearney, Nebraska; Anchorage, Alaska; and Vance and Granville, North Carolina. (See table on page 2)

COMMUNITIES, STATES TAKE ACTION

The places that are reporting progress have taken their own unique approaches to addressing childhood obesity, and there's no clear link that ties specific efforts to declining rates. Yet there is a common thread. Many of these places have made broad, sweeping changes to make healthy foods available in schools and communities and integrate physical activity into people's daily lives. Some of their strategies include implementing state-level legislation or local wellness policies to create healthier schools and child-care centers;^{1,2,3} developing greenway master plans;⁴ creating incentives to bring supermarkets to underserved areas;⁵ incorporating initiatives that support walking and bicycling in transportation plans;⁶ and requiring chain restaurants to post nutrition information.^{2,6}

ADDRESSING DISPARITIES

Childhood obesity disproportionately affects communities of color, and in communities with high levels of poverty, families often lack access to healthy foods and safe places to play. There has been less progress to reduce childhood obesity rates among these populations, but some places have documented modest success. For example, Philadelphia reported the most significant declines in obesity rates among African-American males and Hispanic females.⁷ Philadelphia also reported significant reductions in obesity rates among students from lower-income families.

Place	Ages	Time 1	Obesity Rate at Time 1	Time 2	Obesity Rate at Time 2	Percent Decline
Anchorage, AK ⁸	Grades K, 1, 3, 5, 7	2003-04 school year	16.8%	2010-11 school year	16.3%	-3.0%
California ⁹	Grades 5, 7, 9	2005	38.4%†	2010	38%†	-1.1%
Eastern MA ¹⁰	Under age 6	2004	9.8%	2008	7.7%	-21.4%
Granville, NC ¹¹	Ages 2–18	2005	40.1%†	2009	38.7%†	-3.5%
Kearney, NE ¹²	K–5	2006	16.4%	2011	14.2%	-13.4%
Mississippi ³	K–5	Spring 2005	43%†	Spring 2011	37.3%†	-13.3%
New Mexico ¹³	Grade 3	Fall 2010	22.6%	Fall 2012	21.4%	-5.3%
New York City ¹⁴	K–8	2006-07 school year	21.9%	2010-11 school year	20.7%	-5.5%
Philadelphia, PA ⁷	K–12	2006-07 school year	21.5%	2009-10 school year	20.5%	-4.7%
Vance, NC ¹¹	Ages 2–18	2005	31.9%†	2009	26.5%†	-16.9%
West Virginia ¹⁵	Grade 5	2005-06 school year	30.5%	2011-12 school year	27.8%	-8.6%

Declines reported in this table are based on objective height and weight measures. Data obtained by other means, such as parent- or youth self-reports, have been excluded.

† Combined rates of overweight and obesity.

Other places, including Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Mexico and New York City, have not been as successful in closing the disparities gap.

CONCLUSION

A growing number of reports suggest that strong, far-reaching changes that support healthy eating and regular physical activity are working to reduce childhood obesity rates. More efforts are needed to implement these types of comprehensive changes nationwide and to develop strategies that reduce disparities by preventing obesity among children living in underserved communities and populations that currently experience the highest rates of childhood obesity.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- *Signs of Progress Profiles (RWJF)*
- *F as in Fat: How Obesity Threatens America's Future (RWJF and TFAH)*

¹ www.hsc.wvu.edu/som/hrc/pdfs/Year%202%20HLA%20Executive.pdf

² www.nyc.gov/html/om/pdf/2012/otf_report.pdf

³ www.rwjf.org/en/research-publications/find-rwjf-research/2012/05/year-three-report.html

⁴ www.granvillegreenways.org/master-plan

⁵ <http://thefoodtrust.org/what-we-do/supermarkets>

⁶ www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/COPP/Documents/COPP-ObesityPreventionPlan-2010.pdf.pdf

⁷ www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2012/12_0118.htm

⁸ www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6221a4.htm

⁹ www.publichealthadvocacy.org/research_patchworkprogress.html

¹⁰ <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2012/04/17/peds.2011-1833.full.pdf+htmls>

¹¹ www.gvdhd.org/download/SOTCH%202012%20final_12-20-12.pdf

¹² http://wellness.kearneypublicschools.org/modules/locker/files/get_group_file.phtml?fid=22014484&gid=854539&sessionid=72cd72af8cc3ce7b9d47167ddabd325a

¹³ <http://healthykidsnm.org/resources/NMDOH-HKNM-About-2012-NMChildhoodObesityUpdate.pdf>

¹⁴ www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6049a1.htm

¹⁵ <http://cardiacwv.org/results.php>