



Health Policy Snapshot

Childhood Obesity

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ISSUE BRIEF

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Declining childhood obesity rates—where are we seeing the most progress?

Takeaways:

- Several cities and states throughout the country have recently 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.
- Despite signs of progress, socioeconomic, geographic, and racial and ethnic disparities in obesity rates are persisting in many places.

Overview

In recent years, the national childhood obesity rate has leveled off. However, some cities and states have reported modest declines in their rates, following peaks in the early 2000s.

SIGNS OF PROGRESS

Philadelphia,¹ New York City,² Mississippi,³ and California⁴ are among the places reporting declining childhood obesity rates. (See table on page 2)

CITIES, STATES TAKE ACTION

While many U.S. cities are working to address the obesity epidemic, Philadelphia and New York City have emerged as leaders.

- Since 1992, The Food Trust has been working in Philadelphia to help corner stores offer fresh foods, connect schools with local farms, bring

supermarkets to underserved areas, and ensure that farmers' markets accept food stamps.⁵

- New York City requires chain restaurants to post calorie information on menus and licensed day care centers to offer daily physical activity, limit screen time, and set nutrition standards.⁶ During the past 10 years, the city established active design guidelines for architects and planners and created the Green Cart and Healthy Bucks initiatives to help lower-income families buy local produce.⁷
- Philadelphia and New York City also committed to long-term changes in public schools. In the mid-2000s, both cities implemented strong nutrition standards to improve the foods and beverages available to students.^{8,9}

Mississippi and California are leading efforts to reduce obesity rates at the state level. Both states have focused on creating healthier schools.

- In 2006, the Mississippi State Board of Education set nutritional standards for foods and beverages sold in school vending machines. The Healthy Students Act of 2007 required the state's public schools to provide more physical activity time, offer healthier foods and beverages, and develop health education programs.¹⁰
- In 2007, California set strong nutrition standards for school snacks, and in 2009 it prohibited sugar-sweetened beverages in high schools. A study published in 2012 found that students in California were consuming 158 fewer calories per day than students in states with weaker standards.¹¹

Place	Ages	Time 1	Obesity Rate at Time 1	Time 2	Obesity Rate at Time 2	Percent Decline
Philadelphia	K–12	2006-07 school year	21.5%	2009-10 school year	20.5%	-4.7%
New York City	K–8	2006-07 school year	21.9%	2010-11 school year	20.7%	-5.5%
Mississippi	K–5	Spring 2005	43%†	Spring 2011	37.3%†	-13.3%
California	Grades 5, 7, 9	2005‡	38.44%†	2010‡	38%†	-1.1%

† Combined rates of overweight and obesity

‡ Data calculated from the 2005 and 2010 California Physical Fitness Test, California Department of Education

Both states also support initiatives and policies that promote physical activity and healthy eating in communities.

- Starting in 2008, Mississippi's Childcare Licensure Division helped facilitate the Color Me Healthy program and training classes to create a healthier environment in childcare centers. Mississippi's Fruits and Veggies—More Matters program reached more than 15,000 residents in 2009 through worksite wellness programs, health fairs, and school events.¹²
- In 2008, the California Department of Public Health released an obesity-prevention plan and the state passed two laws, one requiring localities to support walking and bicycling in their transportation plans and another requiring large chain restaurants to post nutrition information.¹³

DISPARITIES PERSIST

To date, only Philadelphia has reported progress in closing the disparities gap. The city achieved the most significant declines in obesity rates among African-American males and Hispanic females, two groups at high risk for obesity.¹ Philadelphia also reported significant reductions in obesity rates among students from lower-income families.

Other places have not been as successful in addressing disparities. Mississippi reported a significant drop in overweight and obesity only among White students. However, rates for Black students appear to be leveling off, which is a major shift after years of steady increases.³ In New York City, obesity rates decreased among all ages, races,

and family income levels of K–8 public school students, but decreases were smaller among populations at high risk for obesity, including Black or Hispanic children and students in high-poverty schools.² And despite a statewide decline in California's rates of overweight and obesity, 31 of its 58 counties reported increases.⁴

CONCLUSION

Growing evidence suggests that strong, far-reaching changes—those that make healthy foods available in schools and communities and integrate physical activity into people's daily lives—are working to reduce childhood obesity rates. More efforts are needed to implement these types of sweeping changes nationwide and to address the health disparities gap that exists among underserved communities and populations.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- [*F as in Fat: How Obesity Threatens America's Future, 2011 \(TFAH\)*](#)
- [*State Actions to Promote Healthy Communities and Prevent Childhood Obesity \(NCSL\)*](#)

¹ www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2012/12_0118.htm

² www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6049a1.htm

³ <http://stage.mshealthpolicy.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/RWJFYear3Report2012.pdf>

⁴ www.publichealthadvocacy.org/research_patchworkprogress.html

⁵ www.thefoodtrust.org/pdf/TFbrochure.pdf

⁶ www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/cdp/cdp_pan_gcc.shtml

⁷ www.nyc.gov/html/om/pdf/2012/otf_report.pdf

⁸ [Ww.nyc.gov/html/om/pdf/2012/otf_report.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/om/pdf/2012/otf_report.pdf)

⁹ <http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/nutrition/policies--procedures>

¹⁰ www.healthyschools.ms.org/ohs_main/MShealthystudentsact.htm

¹¹ www.rwjf.org/childhoodobesity/product.jsp?id=74383

¹² http://www.msdh.state.ms.us/msdhsite/_static/resources/3433.pdf

¹³ www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/COPP/Pages/default.aspx