

Some Big Apple residents aren't as big as they were

By ACSH Staff — December 19, 2011

In a reversal of a longstanding trend, childhood obesity rates in the city of New York have finally declined, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. Rates of obesity among children in kindergarten through eighth grade decreased in 2010-2011 as compared with 2006-2007. Among public elementary and middle school students in the city, [obesity rates declined](#) ^[1] by 5.5 percent, from an overall incidence of 21.9 percent down to 20.7 percent. This is the largest drop seen among children in this age group in any U.S. city of this size. (However, only obesity as opposed to the percentage of overweight children was considered in the NYC report.)

Nevertheless, national childhood obesity rates remain high although some other areas are starting to see downward trends similar to those in New York City. California, for instance, saw a small reduction in childhood obesity this year, with a drop of 1.1 percent from five years ago, leaving the percentage of children who are overweight or obese at 38 percent.

ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross finds New York City's decrease in childhood obesity encouraging. Just over 5 percent doesn't sound like a lot at first glance, he says, but in reality, it comprises a large number of children and, what's more, it reverses a trend of continually increasing rates of childhood obesity. This is clearly good news. But of course it will be important to see what happens over the course of a few years.

Among the children who were assessed, the greatest decline in obesity rates was among those between the ages of five and six, with a decrease of 9.9 percent. ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava notes that this is a particularly positive change. If these young kids can keep the excess weight off, she says, this is a trend that will hopefully continue as these children grow up. But Dr. Kava also cautions that it may be important to distinguish between rates of severe obesity versus obesity alone. Previous studies have suggested that, even in cases where overall rates of obesity are decreasing, severe obesity may actually be increasing, she comments.

ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan credits much of the decline in obesity rates to an increased awareness in the population and particularly among parents of the adverse health effects associated with excessive weight, the importance of prevention, and an increased focus on physical activity. Dr. Ross, however, takes issue with those who claim that any decrease in obesity is the result of the fight against sugary beverages. People who make such a claim are taking far too much credit for a misguided and ineffective campaign, he says, citing a recent study showing that soda consumption in the U.S. has declined at the same time that [obesity rates were rising](#) ^[2] overall.

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Links

[1] <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/dec/15/news/la-heb-childhood-obesity-declines-new-york-20111215>

[2] http://www.acsh.org/factsfears/newsid.3049/news_detail.asp