

Childhood obesity rates drop in Philadelphia

By ACSH Staff — September 10, 2012

Childhood obesity is a matter of concern not only because of its [associated health risks](#) [1], but also because obese children are more likely to become obese adults, where such excess weight can lead to even more serious health conditions. Hence the cautiously optimistic reaction to [news](#) [2] that the childhood obesity rate has dropped significantly in Philadelphia. Cautious, because it's still unclear what led to the decrease but optimistic, because some part of the city's recent public health initiatives seem to have worked.



For their [study](#) [3], published in *Preventing Chronic Disease*,

researchers from the Philadelphia Department of Health analyzed data from over 100,000 students in kindergarten through grade twelve in the public school system, looking specifically at the period from 2006 to 2010. At the beginning of the study, the rate of obesity among the city's public school children was 21.5 percent; by 2010, it had dropped to 20.5 percent a decrease of nearly 5 percent.

The most significant improvement was seen in children from kindergarten through fifth grade, where the prevalence of obesity dropped by 6 percent. That compared to grades six through eight and grades nine through 12, where the declines were 4.7 percent and 2.4 percent, respectively. Even more encouraging were the improvements seen among African American boys (down 13.8 percent) and Hispanic girls (down 10.2 percent).

As the [editorial](#) [4] accompanying the study notes, the promising news in Philly is similar to that seen in states such as California and New York, where public health initiatives to combat childhood obesity have been boldest. That editorial credits efforts on the part of Philadelphia health officials, which include developing incentives for convenience stores to carry fresh produce, tightening standards for the snack foods and beverages offered in schools, offering free breakfast to all students, discontinuing the use of cafeteria fryers, and switching from 2 percent to 1 percent milk. There was also an effort to better inform parents about the sugar content of various beverages, while nutrition and physical activity standards were set in action among after-school and recreation programs.

ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan, pleased with the news, notes that no single element of the recent health initiatives can take sole credit. You can't just say it's soda; you can't just say it's milk. It has to be an overall change, she says. And it seems that they have indeed made a number of changes.

ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava observes that it's promising that the declining rates of obesity are being seen in younger children. It suggests that parents, too, are getting the message, she says. And while this isn't a huge decrease, if it continues, that will be even better news.

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Links

[1] <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood/basics.html>

[2] <http://www.latimes.com/health/boostershots/la-heb-progress-child-obesity-20120906,0,1083133.story>

[3] http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2012/12_0118.htm

[4] http://198.246.124.20/pcd/issues/2012/12_0182.htm