Extreme obesity rate decreasing in young kids

By ACSH Staff — September 28, 2012

A new study by the CDC is providing at least a glimmer of hope that certain intervention and prevention strategies may be reversing the trend of extreme obesity among young children.

Led by the CDC’s Dr. Liping Pan, the study analyzed data on over 26 million children from 30 states and the District of Columbia from 1998 to 2010 as part of the CDC’s Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance System. The research specifically focused on two- to four-year-olds from low-income families, and the findings showed that, although extreme obesity among this cohort increased by about 4.6 percent annually between 1998 and 2003, it actually started to decrease by 1.8 percent per year through 2010.

The rate of extreme obesity which is defined by the CDC as 1.2 times the 95th percentile of the national body mass index (BMI) for this age group declined steadily to just over 2 percent in 2010 from 2.22 percent in 2003. It’s also important to note that the decreases were consistent across almost all age, sex, and race/ethnicity subgroups.

Presented at the national Obesity Society meeting, the study attributes the decline to a number of things, including state and local childhood obesity prevention efforts, as well as the success of national recommendations for preventing childhood obesity.

While the obesity problem is still a huge one, and the decline was not monumental, says ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross, it’s at least comforting to see the rates of extreme obesity are finally going in the opposite direction.

It’s particularly important to see this news in surveys of young children, even though the data are preliminary, observes ACSH’s Dr. Ruth Kava. If such decreases continue, these children may have lower risk of obesity-associated diseases in the future than would otherwise be the case.