More good news about childhood obesity

By ACSH Staff — January 18, 2013

Both New York City and Los Angeles have seen declines in childhood obesity rates, with New York leading the way, according to a new study [1]. The prevalence of obesity peaked in New York around 2003-2004, while in Los Angeles this leveling off did not occur until 2008-2009, with rates beginning to decline in 2010-2011. This may be the result of New York government programs promoting healthy behaviors in low-income kids earlier than in LA.

The first such program, Eat Well Play Hard, initiated by the New York state WIC (Women, Infants and Children) program, involved promoting nutrition messages to the public, such as drinking low-fat milk, eating more fruits and vegetables and exercising. The program also supported breastfeeding and limiting TV time for young children.

The fact that New York City has been seeing this decline in obesity for years, whereas other cities may just be starting to level off suggests that ongoing education, support and approaches that target specific cultural and socioeconomic groups can have positive effects in reducing childhood obesity, according to Samantha Heller, clinical nutrition coordinator at the Center for Cancer Care at Griffin Hospital in Derby, Conn. However, change does take time and there is still much that needs to be done to encourage our families and children to be healthy.

I believe that to a significant extent, the gradual decline in children’s obesity rates that seems to have started almost a decade ago came through simple, parent-guided measures consequent to the increasing awareness of the extent of the problem, said ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross. There were few official programs aimed at obesity back then, the state’s WIC nutritional guidelines being one exception, although aimed at a sliver of the population. Certainly banning large-sized sodas had nothing to do with it.

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