Obesity rates steady in 44 states, but concerns still remain

By ACSH Staff — September 5, 2014

Earlier this year, the CDC released a report indicating that the prevalence of obesity in children ages two to five was on the decline. Now, according to a new report released by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Trust for America's Health, obesity rates remain steady in 44 states and the District of Columbia. The report also found that rates of childhood obesity in those aged two to nineteen have stabilized as well, with rates declining for those in the youngest group. In fact, of the forty states that collect BMI data for children ages two to five, eighteen reported declines in obesity between 2008 and 2011. Obesity is defined as having a BMI of 30 or greater.

But this report was not all good news. Researchers used data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System conducted by the CDC to determine obesity data. Because the data rely on self-report, researchers believe that this current report may actually be an underestimation of America's obesity rates because people may underreport weight and exaggerate height. This is inherent in any study using self-reported data.

Although these findings are encouraging, there are exceptions. For example, for the first time, two states Mississippi and West Virginia have reported rates of obesity of over 35 percent. And in Colorado the state with the lowest rate of obesity the prevalence still remains about 21 percent.

The report also includes additional concerns about the higher obesity rates in certain socioeconomic groups: African Americans, Latinos, adults earning less than $15,000 a year and those who have not finished high school. Authors of the report suggest policy initiatives such as physical activity programs in schools, improving nutritional quality of school meals, allowing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (the Food Stamp program which offers nutrition assistance to low-income individuals and families) participants to use benefits at farmers markets and ensuring that health professionals are more active in battling the bulge.

ACSH's Ariel Savransky adds, Although this report does deliver some positive news, the reality is that the obesity crisis is still just that a crisis. This report is no reason to relax our efforts to combat this problem. In fact, it should be used to focus efforts on those groups that need it the most, such
as in those states with the highest rates of obesity. She goes on: The authors also make an interesting point about health professionals being more attentive to this problem. It's extremely important that physicians talk to obese patients about the actions they should be taking to lose weight.