

## Medication use higher among overweight, obese kids

October 4 2012, by Bryan Alary

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Overweight children aged 12 to 19 are 59 per cent more likely than normal-weight kids to take prescription medication, according to UAlberta research.

Overweight children are far more likely to take prescription medications than children of a normal weight—a trend that adds to already higher health-care costs for treating childhood obesity, according to new research from the University of Alberta.

Researchers from the School of Public Health analyzed the medication use of more than 2,000 Canadian [children](#) through the 2007 to 2009 Canadian [Health Measures](#) Survey. They found that overweight and obese kids aged 12 to 19 years were 59 per cent more likely than their

normal-weight peers to take prescription medication.

Co-author Christina Fung said prescription drug expenditures have doubled over the past decade and now account for 17 per cent of health-care costs in Canada—the second highest after hospital expenses. Having a more complete picture helps governments and health-care providers direct spending more effectively, she said.

"Overweight and obese patients are more expensive to the health-care system in terms of using medication and prescription drugs," she said. "In Canada, we have a public health-care system, and this is an issue of accountability and where health-care dollars are spent, and when."

The study also showed that overweight and obese children were twice as likely to take medication for respiratory ailments such as asthma and allergies.

Co-author Paul Veugelers, Canada Research Chair in Population Health, said the data show that governments need to direct more attention to prevention. Childhood [obesity rates](#) have tripled in Canada over the last 25 years, and an estimated 34 per cent of kids aged two to 17 are now overweight or obese.

"By investing in prevention in kids—promotion of healthy eating and active living—there's an immediate payback in terms of health-care costs," said Veugelers, a professor and director of the [Population Health Intervention Research Unit](#) that works with the Alberta Project Promoting active Living and healthy Eating (APPLE Schools).

"Children who are not overweight are less likely to develop diabetes, or 30 to 40 years later get a heart attack or end up with cancer. Forty years from now you see a real return in terms of health-care costs."

The results showed little difference in medication use among children aged six to 11. Veugelers hypothesized that this finding could indicate that a prolonged lifestyle of unhealthy eating and physical inactivity is needed before children need additional medication.

**More information:** [adc.bmj.com/content/97/9/842.long](http://adc.bmj.com/content/97/9/842.long)

Provided by University of Alberta

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