

Second to US in obesity, Mexico wants kids to slim down

October 20 2012, by Deborah Bonello

Mexico, second in obesity in the world after the United States, wants its children to cut down on the soft drinks and fatty foods that have made them the chubbiest kids in Latin America.

Worried about the growing [waistlines](#) in schools, the public education ministry has launched a campaign to encourage youngsters to change their eating habits.

Mexicans are the world champions in soft drink consumption, guzzling down 163 liters (43 gallons) of sweet bubbly drinks per capita every year, according to Consumer Power, an independent organization.

Food stands are everywhere on Mexican streets, dishing out handfuls of greasy tacos for just \$1, while ambulant vendors wait outside schools to sell cheap tamales or tortas (sandwiches) to hungry students.

To nutritionist Tamara Vera, Mexico suffers from "bad nutrition and bad habits like a lack of exercise, a lack of [water consumption](#) and too much grease and sugar."

The education ministry, with the help of various embassies, led a campaign called "The Week of Taste" in 124 schools this week to teach children better eating habits.

The masked and muscular stars from the country's ultra-popular Lucha Libre, or professional wrestling, circuit have been recruited by the

government to help drill new eating habits into people's consciousness.

But Education Minister Jose Angel Cordova warned that it would take time to reduce [child obesity](#), stressing that a "new culture" must be instilled in families and Mexican society at large.

"The (child) [obesity problem](#) arrived over 30 years and maybe we won't need 30 years (to reduce it), but we will need at least 10 years to stabilize it," he told reporters after a meeting of Latin American education ministers.

The French ambassador to Mexico, Elisabeth Beton Delegue, said the goal of "The Week of Taste" is to "give children the desire to eat healthy and become interested again in natural and simple [flavors](#)."

In Mexico, 30 percent of adults are obese compared to 33.8 percent in world leader the [United States](#), according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Mexico ranks fourth in the world in child obesity after Greece, the United States and Italy, the OECD says, citing the International Association for the Study of Obesity.

But it tops other Latin America nations with 29 percent of boys and 28.1 percent of girls obese.

Mexican government figures show that 70 percent of the population is overweight, a number that includes those who are obese.

Health problems linked to being overweight—diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease—cost Mexico around \$3.2 million in 2008.

The number one killer in [Mexico](#) is Type 2 diabetes, a chronic disease

marked by high levels of sugar in the blood.

"If we don't move from a treatment to a preventive system and we don't change our habits, the health system will not be able to meet the needs of Mexicans," said Miguel Limon Garcia, social coordinator at the health ministry.

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