

Childhood obesity starts at home

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As parents, physicians and policymakers look for ways to curb childhood obesity, they may need to look no further than a child's own backyard.

A new study to be presented Saturday, May 4, at the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) annual meeting shows that preschool children are less likely to be obese if they live in a neighborhood that is safe and within walking distance of parks and retail services.

"A child's neighborhood is a potentially modifiable risk factor for obesity that we can target in order to stop the increasing [prevalence of obesity](#) in young children," said lead author Julia B. Morinis, MD, MSc, a pediatrician at Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

The study is part of a Canadian [research collaboration](#) called TARGetKids! (The Applied Research Group for Kids) that aims to determine if factors early in life are related to later health problems. Healthy children ages 0-5 years are enrolled in the ongoing study. Information is collected on their height, weight, [waist circumference](#), nutrition, and physical and [sedentary activity](#). Blood samples also are taken from each child.

For this study, researchers used TARGetKids data on 3,928 children in Toronto to determine if where they live was related to whether they were overweight or obese. Neighborhoods were evaluated based on car ownership, population, distance to retail locations, distance to parks and safety.

Results showed that 21 percent of the children were overweight, and 5 percent were obese, which is similar to the Canadian norms. Higher rates of overweight/obesity were found among children who live in neighborhoods that have fewer destinations within walking distance.

"How conducive a child's neighborhood is to physical activity is related to a child's [body mass index](#) (BMI) even after adjusting for factors we know are associated with obesity, including socioeconomic status, immigration, ethnicity, parental BMI, physical activity, age, gender and birth weight," Dr. Morinis said.

Further research is needed to better understand the relationship between neighborhood factors and obesity so that the risk of obesity can be reduced through neighborhood changes and urban planning, the investigators concluded.

More information: To view the abstract, "The Weight of Place: The Role of the Neighborhood in Pre-School Obesity," go to www.abstracts2view.com/pas/view...hp?nu=PAS13L1_1685.8

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