

Community-based programs may help prevent childhood obesity

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When it comes to confronting childhood obesity, researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health conclude that community-based approaches are important. A systematic review of childhood obesity prevention programs found that community-based intervention programs that incorporate schools and focus on both diet and physical activity are more effective at preventing obesity in children. The results of the study appear online in *Pediatrics*.

"In measuring the effectiveness of community-based programs that impact childhood obesity – more comprehensive interventions are definitely better," said Sara Bleich, PhD, associate professor of [Health Policy](#) and Management and lead author on the paper. "The research shows that in order to help prevent obesity among [children](#), we must focus on both diet and exercise in the communities where children live and go to school since the environment is a key contributor to obesity risk. Focusing on the community is especially important for children since they generally have little or no control over their environment."

This shift toward a stronger community focus is echoed in a recent Institute of Medicine (IOM) report, *Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention*, which recommends a comprehensive approach to childhood [obesity prevention](#) that includes the community.

Researchers examined nine studies that featured community-based interventions and found that, among those, the two interventions that included a school component effectively prevented obesity or

overweight in children. Common characteristics found across most of the nine studies included the use of multiple intervention components (e.g., health education and family outreach), the inclusion of settings other than just the community (e.g., school, home, primary care, child care), and a focus on children at middle school age or younger.

"While additional research is needed to assess the full impact of community-based interventions on the prevention of [childhood obesity](#), our conclusions indicate that more comprehensive approaches, which attempt to modify diet and exercise in the community with engagement from the schools, weigh in everyone's favor," said Bleich.

Provided by Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health

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