

Many Latino kids struggle to reach a healthy weight by kindergarten

January 26 2016

More Latino kids are obese by ages 2-5 than white kids, due to maternal obesity, less exclusive breastfeeding, and workplace and childcare issues that affect nutrition and physical activity levels, according to a new package of research from Salud America!, a national network for Latino childhood obesity prevention funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and based at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio.

Salud America!'s Healthy Weight by Kindergarten for Latino Kids research package includes an in-depth review of the latest science on the health of Latinos ages 0-5, policy recommendations based on that research, an issue brief, animated video and infographics.

Research shows half of Latinas are overweight/obese when they get pregnant. Obese Latina moms gave birth to [kids](#) who were 1.8 times more likely to be obese than their peers.

Breastfeeding can reduce obesity by 47 percent among Latino kids, but Latina moms are less likely than white moms to exclusively breastfeed their infants through age 1 because of a lack of prenatal programs, lack of paid maternity leave and breastfeeding-unfriendly workplaces.

But several policies are emerging to improve maternal and child health:

- Kids were less likely to be overweight or obese if the mother reported moderate exercise during pregnancy than if the mother

reported remaining sedentary.

- Women in a nurse-mother prenatal program in Colorado (47 percent Latina) had more than 90 percent of babies born at a [healthy weight](#) and 91 percent of mothers initiating breastfeeding.
- In California (39 percent Latino), where a paid family leave program is in place, breastfeeding duration was twice as long among mothers who took paid family leave.
- Latina moms were 30 percent more likely than white moms to breastfeed infants for at least 6 months in states with laws that provided break time from work, and 20 percent more likely in regions with enforcement provisions for workplace pumping laws.
- Improving nutrition and physical activity standards in early childcare settings can curb kids' fat intake, increase fruit/vegetable consumption and boost activity levels.

"Interventions or policies aimed at improving breastfeeding rates among Latina mothers and improving healthy lifestyle standards in prenatal and early childcare settings are critical to promoting healthy weight goals," said Dr. Amelie G. Ramirez, director of Salud America! and the Institute for Health Promotion Research at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio.

Obesity is a problem among Latino kids. About one of four U.S. kids is overweight or obese by age 2-5, with a higher rate among Latino kids (30 percent) than white kids (21 percent).

To examine the barriers preventing Latino children from growing up at a healthy weight, and provide suggestions on solutions, Salud America! is developing five new packages of research, infographics, and videos that cover:

- Better Food in the Neighborhood (Dec. 8, 2015);
- Active Spaces (Jan. 12 2016);
- Healthier Schools (Jan. 19 2016);
- Healthy Weight by Kindergarten (Jan. 26, 2016); and
- Sugary Drinks (February 2016).

"Healthy Weight by Kindergarten for Latino Kids" includes these policy recommendations:

- Policymakers should expand and enforce state and federal policies promoting breastfeeding in hospitals, childcare centers, workplaces and public settings to promote breastfeeding initiation and duration. Policies could include: paid maternity leave, break time and/or private places to breastfeed or pump at work, reducing direct and inadvertent formula marketing in hospitals and other settings, etc.
- Healthcare providers should use prenatal educational programs to: promote breastfeeding; help pregnant Latinas overcome cultural misconceptions that result in unsafe gestational weight gain and sedentary behaviors; and prevent improper feeding practices common among Latinas (bottle propping and early introduction to solid foods).
- Early childcare providers should enforce age-appropriate eating and [physical activity](#) requirements (i.e., replacing sugary drinks with water, offering daily activity) for all kids in their care, and should serve as a resource to educate parents in these areas as well.

"It will take a team effort to get Latino kids on the path to a healthy weight," Dr. Ramirez said.

More information: Access the full Salud America! "Healthy Weight by Kindergarten for Latino Kids" research at

[www.communitycommons.org/group ... s/sa-healthy-weight/](http://www.communitycommons.org/group...s/sa-healthy-weight/).

Provided by University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio

Citation: Many Latino kids struggle to reach a healthy weight by kindergarten (2016, January 26)
retrieved 27 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-01-latino-kids-struggle-healthy-weight.html>

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