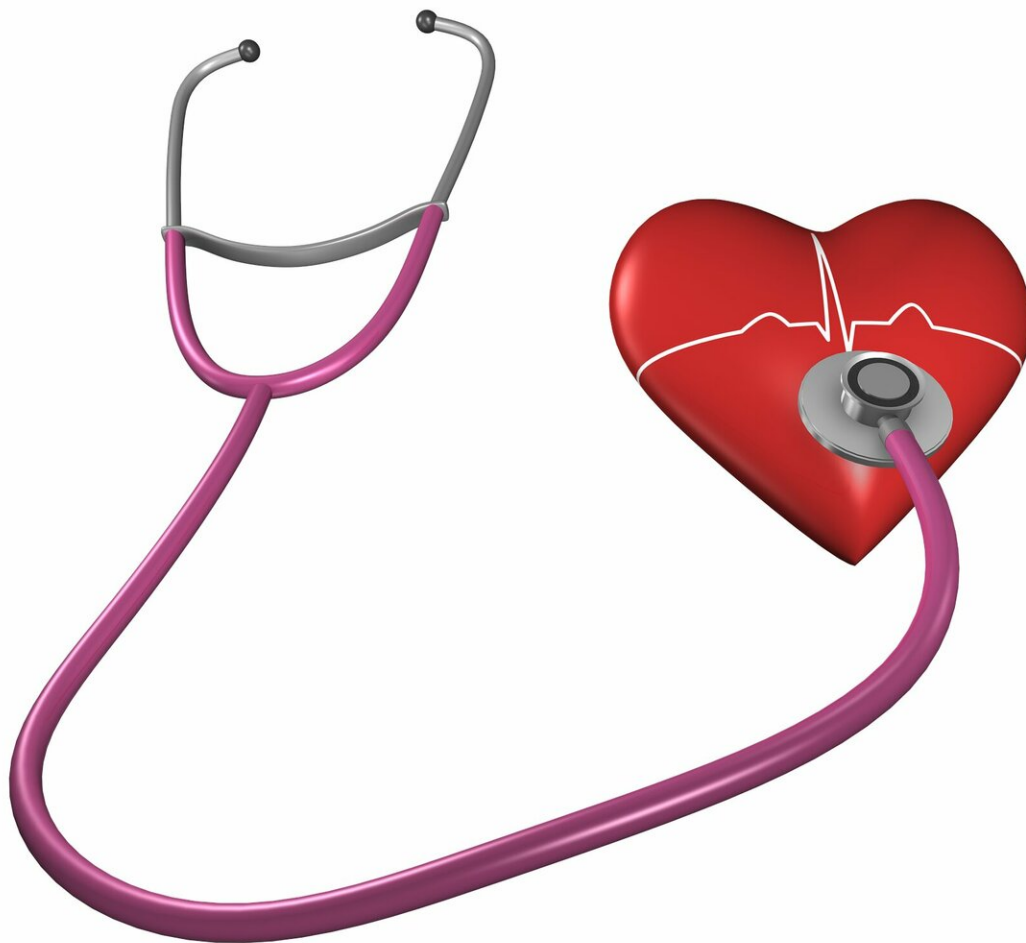


Only half of US kids and teens have ideal cholesterol levels

May 21 2019



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Cholesterol levels in U.S. youth have improved from 1999 to 2016, but only half of children and adolescents are in the ideal range and 25 percent are in the clinically high range, according to a study published in *JAMA*, led by Amanda Marma Perak, MD MS, cardiologist at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago. The study is the first to report estimated prevalence of high cholesterol in youth in recent years, analyzing nationally representative data from more than 26,000 children and adolescents (ages 6-19 years).

"High [cholesterol](#) in childhood is one of the key risk factors for developing [heart disease](#) later in life," says Dr. Marma Perak from Lurie Children's, who is also an Assistant Professor of Pediatric Cardiology and Preventive Medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. "Although we see favorable trends in all measures of cholesterol in children and adolescents over the years, we still need to work harder to ensure that many more kids have healthy [cholesterol levels](#). We know that [high cholesterol](#) is the critical initiator of atherosclerotic plaques in the arteries, and even in childhood it is associated with these changes in the [blood vessels](#) that can lead to [heart attack](#) in adulthood."

For [children](#) and adolescents, ideal measures include total cholesterol (TC) at less than 170 mg/dL, LDL or "bad" cholesterol at less than 110 mg/dL and HDL or "good" cholesterol at greater than 45 mg/dL. These levels are associated with better long-term health. All youth should have their cholesterol checked at ages 9 to 11 years and again at 17 to 21 years, according to the latest guidelines from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

"If a child is found to have borderline-high or high levels of cholesterol, we can usually improve those levels through lifestyle changes, such as healthier diet and increased physical activity," says Dr. Marma Perak. "Children are rarely placed on cholesterol-lowering medications like statins."

The improving cholesterol trends observed in the study are surprising given that obesity is one of the factors that drives abnormal cholesterol levels and childhood obesity continues to increase.

"More research is needed to understand the reasons for the favorable cholesterol trends we found," says Dr. Marma Perak. "Some factors that influence cholesterol may be improving, such as decreased trans fats in the food supply. Although more efforts are needed, the fact that cholesterol levels are moving in the right direction warrants some optimism about the future cardiovascular health of our population since cholesterol is such an important driver of cardiovascular disease."

More information: *JAMA* (2019). [DOI: 10.1001/jama.2019.4984](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2019.4984)

Provided by Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago

Citation: Only half of US kids and teens have ideal cholesterol levels (2019, May 21) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-05-kids-teens-ideal-cholesterol.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--