

# Food access near schools and homes illuminated for children in New York City

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A study of nearly 800,000 schoolchildren in New York City shows that Black, Hispanic, and Asian students live and go to school closer to both healthy and unhealthy food outlets than do White students. Brian Elbel of the New York University School of Medicine and colleagues present these findings in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE*.

Childhood obesity is a major health issue in the U.S. Income and race/ethnicity are key factors associated with obesity, and disparities in obesity among children could be driven by disparities in food access between neighborhoods. Previous research has examined food access by income and race/ethnicity, but many of these studies have had significant limitations, such as relying on imprecise data to define food access or focusing on only one type of food outlet.

Elbel and colleagues have now conducted the first food-access study to incorporate precise home and school address data for each student. The researchers used NYC Department of Education data for 789,520 New York City kindergarteners through 12th graders to calculate the distance to each student's closest food outlet and the number of outlets within 0.25 miles.

The scientists hypothesized that [low-income](#) or minority students would have greater access to unhealthy food outlets, such as fast-food restaurants and corner stores, and less access to healthier outlets like wait-service restaurants and supermarkets. However, they found that Black, Hispanic, and Asian students lived and went to school closer to all four types of food outlets than did White students, regardless of poverty status.

The authors acknowledge some limitations of their study, such as a lack of data to determine just how healthy a particular food outlet might be. Still, they provide a detailed picture of food access that could improve understanding of disparities and inform efforts to address [childhood obesity](#). Further research is needed to understand the causes of food-access disparities and their association with [health outcomes](#), in New York City and other regions.

**More information:** Elbel B, Tamura K, McDermott ZT, Duncan DT, Athens JK, Wu E, et al. (2019) Disparities in food access around homes

and schools for New York City children. *PLoS ONE* 14(6): e0217341.  
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