

Nearly 5 million American kids are obese, new study finds

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(HealthDay)—America's child obesity epidemic shows no signs of

shrinking.

About 4.8 million American kids aged 10 to 17—just over 15%—were obese in 2017-2018, according to a new report.

"These new data show that this challenge touches the lives of far too many children in this country," said Dr. Richard Besser, the president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which produced the new report.

It found that the five states with the highest youth obesity rates were Mississippi (25.4%), West Virginia (20.9%), Kentucky (20.8%), Louisiana (20.8%) and Michigan (18.9%).

The lowest rates were seen in Utah (8.7%), Minnesota (9.4%), Alaska (9.9%), Colorado (10.7%) and Montana (10.8%).

Progress against [child obesity](#) seems to have stalled: The report's authors said that no states had statistically [significant changes](#) in obesity rates between 2016 and 2017-2018.

The report also noted large racial and ethnic disparities. Obesity rates among black and Hispanic youth (22% and 19%, respectively) were sharply higher than among whites and Asians (about 12% and 7%, respectively).

"Black and Hispanic youth are still at greater risk than their white and Asian peers," Besser said in a foundation news release.

Family income also had a major impact, the findings showed. The obesity rate among youth in households with incomes below the federal poverty line was nearly 22%, compared to about 9% in households with incomes four times higher than the poverty line.

"These differences by race, ethnicity, and geography did not happen by chance," Besser believes. "They are a result of discriminatory policies and systems that have been in place for decades. However, we have the power to change these outcomes and make our nation a more equitable society. The more we understand the barriers to [good health](#), the more we can do to address them."

Obesity increases the risk for health problems, such as type 2 diabetes, [heart disease](#) and certain types of cancer. Research shows prevention efforts early in life reduce the risk of obesity later. One study found that overweight 5-year-olds were four times more likely than those with a healthy weight to be obese by age 14.

The new report offered a number of recommendations for combating youth obesity. It called on the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to scrap proposed changes that would take away food stamps (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP) from millions of recipients. Nearly one-third of children aged 4 or younger participate in SNAP in a given month.

The report also urged the USDA to maintain nutrition standards for school meals that were in effect before December 2018, and current standards for school snacks.

In addition, the report said that the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention should receive enough funding to provide grants to all 50 states for campaigns to reduce obesity, and states should let cities and counties regulate, tax or take other measures to combat [obesity](#).

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics has more on [childhood obesity](#).

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