

# **Childhood obesity rates could increase if schools stay closed through December, study finds**

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The past few years have shown signs that alarmingly high childhood obesity rates in the U.S. may finally be stabilizing. But that may change if school closures continue into December, according to a new study by Washington University.

The childhood obesity rate may increase 2.4%—equal to 1.27 million children—if [school](#) closures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus continue into December, according to the study recently published in the *Journal of Sport and Health Science*.

"The harsh reality is, for the coming months or longer, the majority of children in the U.S. may not fully resume their daily physical activity routines due to the nationwide closure of schools, gyms, recreation centers and parks, and cancellation of sports activities," said Ruopeng An, an assistant professor at the Brown School of Social Work at Washington University and author of the study.

On what scale schools will reopen after summer break are contingent on how the COVID-19 pandemic evolves, An said.

The study's simulation models showed extended [school closures](#) would affect obesity among boys the most, especially non-Hispanic blacks and Hispanics.

"Customized [policy interventions](#) are warranted to prevent further deterioration of weight-related health outcomes among these two socioeconomically disadvantaged racial/ethnic minority groups," An stated in a news release.

The prevalence of childhood obesity has increased threefold over the past few decades in the U.S. In 2017 and 2018, 18.5% or 13.7 million children ages 2-19 years were considered obese.

A report released last fall from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation reviewed childhood [obesity](#) data from several national surveys and found that rates had finally begun to stabilize and even decrease among some groups, especially preschoolers from poor households.

Health experts recommend 60 minutes or more of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily for children; and no more than two hours of being sedentary.

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