

Young children gained weight during the pandemic

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A Kaiser Permanente study of nearly 200,000 children showed that children gained excess weight during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially those between 5 and 11 years old. The study was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

"When we compared the weight gain among children from 2019 to

2020, we found that there was more weight gained during the pandemic for youths of all ages," said the senior author, Corinna Koebnick, Ph.D., of the Kaiser Permanente Southern California Department of Research & Evaluation. "And, this weight gain fell disproportionately on the youngest children. On average, 5- to-11-year-olds gained 5 extra pounds, while 16- to-17-year-olds gained 2 extra pounds. The result was an almost 9% increase in the [youngest children](#) falling into the categories of being overweight and obese."

"As children go back to school it will be important to focus on health and [physical activity](#) to help children not carry unwanted extra weight into adulthood."

To determine if children picked up extra weight during the pandemic, researchers analyzed the electronic health records of 191,509 members of Kaiser Permanente in Southern California who were age 5 to 17 from March 1, 2019, to January 31, 2021.

The study found that during the COVID-19 pandemic there was an increase in body weight and in the [prevalence of obesity](#), particularly for children 5 to 11 years old.

- Youth age 5 to 11 years gained 5.07 pounds more during COVID-19 than during the same time period before COVID-19, while youth age 12 to 15 years and 16 to 17 years gained an excess of 5.1 pounds and 2.26 pounds over the prior year, respectively.
- Among 5-to-11-year-olds, this [weight gain](#) resulted in almost 9% more children becoming overweight or obese compared to 5% in youth ages 12 to 15 years and 3% in youth ages 16 to 17 years. Most of the increase among youths 5-11 and 12-15 years old was due to an increase in obesity.

"We need to immediately begin to invest in monitoring the worsening obesity epidemic and develop diet and activity interventions to help [children](#) achieve and maintain a healthy weight," Dr. Koebnick said.

More information: Susan J. Woolford et al, Changes in Body Mass Index Among Children and Adolescents During the COVID-19 Pandemic, *JAMA* (2021). [DOI: 10.1001/jama.2021.15036](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2021.15036)

Provided by Kaiser Permanente

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