



Fact Sheet on Childhood and Adolescent Obesity in Arkansas

Obesity facts:

- The prevalence of childhood obesity **doubled** in the past two decades and **tripled** in adolescents.
- An estimated 130 million Americans, or **64%**, are overweight or obese.
- **One in three** Arkansas public school students are overweight or at risk for overweight and One in four Arkansas high school students is either overweight or at risk for being overweight.
- Overweight children have a higher risk of developing diabetes orthopedic problems, sleep disturbances, and kidney problems. In addition, children who are overweight or obese are more likely to develop high blood pressure, high cholesterol and heart disease as adults.
- **65%** of obese 5-10 year olds have a minimum of one cardiovascular risk factor and **25%** have two or more.
- Parental obesity more than **doubles** the risk of adult obesity among both obese and non-obese children under age 10.
- This generation of obese children may have a lifespan **10 years** shorter than that of their parents.
- Long-term health problems associated with obesity cost the health care system **\$120 billion** each year.
- Behavioral and psychological problems have been related to childhood obesity. Obese children are **twice as likely** to be in special education than their non-obese counterparts.

Arkansas led the nation as the first state to address the epidemic of childhood obesity:

- Established the *Arkansas Child Health Advisory Committee* to make nutrition and physical activity policy recommendations to the State Board of Education and the State Board of Health.
- Prohibited in-school access to vending machines offering food and beverages in all elementary schools.
- Required schools to report ALL money received from food and beverage contracts.
- Mandated the creation of community advisory committees to raise awareness of the importance of proper nutrition and physical activity.
- Called for the incorporation of nutrition and physical activity goals and objectives into the annual school planning and reporting process.
- Mandated that parents receive an annual report listing their child's **Body Mass Index** (BMI – calculated by taking the child's height and weight ratio and applying this number to an age appropriate growth chart), an explanation of possible health effects of BMI, as well as nutrition and physical activity suggestions.

Reasons to perform BMI assessments of Arkansas school students:

- Annual Body Mass Index (BMI) screenings are recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics for all children and adolescents.
- The Institute of Medicine recommends that schools conduct annual assessments of students' weight, height, and body mass index and make that information available to parents.
- Parents are often unaware their kids are obese. In a recent study, one-third of mothers and more than one-half of fathers whose children are obese said they thought their children's weight was "about right."
- Many children do not make regular visits to the doctor, and when they do, few pediatricians use the BMI in their physicals and evaluations.
- Parents want and deserve to be informed if their children are at risk for developing health problems.
- Screening for vision and hearing problems are currently conducted in schools. BMI assessment is a screening tool to determine if children are overweight, underweight or at risk for becoming over / underweight.
- Parents of children determined to be overweight, underweight or at risk are encouraged in a Child Health Report to seek counseling from their doctor, school nurse, or other healthcare provider.
- Preventing and / or treating childhood obesity is more effective than treating obesity in adults. Childhood is an important opportunity to develop healthy patterns for life and prevent weight problems.
- BMI assessments were performed and Child Health Reports were delivered using procedures that were **private, confidential and accurate.**

BMI assessment screening programs have been conducted successfully in other states (PA, FL, MA, and SD)

- Body Mass Index (BMI) is widely accepted as a reliable and valid tool for assessing overweight in children.
- Parents of overweight children in Cambridge, Massachusetts (Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, August 2003) who received health and fitness reports planned to change their child's diet and physical activity.
- Of these overweight children, **19%** of parents planned dietary changes and **42%** planned changes in physical activity of their children.
- **One in four** of these parents planned to seek medical assistance for their children.
- The East Penn School District in Emmaus, PA, have seen a significant drop in the number of overweight students since implementing efforts to fight childhood obesity.

Source: Arkansas BMI Task Force, a partnership of Arkansans including: Local School Districts, Arkansas Center for Health Improvement, Arkansas Department of Education, Arkansas Department of Health, and UAMS College of Public Health.