

Childhood Obesity Data

United States

Between 1971-1975 and 1999-2002, the prevalence of obesity nationally has more than doubled for children ages 2 to 5 and 12 to 19 and has more than tripled for children aged 6 to 11, according to data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES).^{*} Currently, approximately nine million children ages six to 19 (about 16%) in the United States are obese. Federal policy makers now rank the childhood obesity epidemic as a critical health threat because of its association with a variety of chronic diseases, as well as social and emotional problems.

Rhode Island

Although more complete data are needed, rates of childhood obesity across the state are similarly alarming. At least one in five Rhode Island children is overweight or obese. Not surprisingly, data also show that many children are not receiving adequate physical activity or nutrition.

Obesity

- National Survey of Children's Health data show that 21.4% of children aged less than 18 in RI were obese and another 15.7% were overweight in 2003.
- In 2001, according to the Health Interview Survey (HIS), 19.6% of children between the ages of six and 19 in RI were obese and an additional 14.8% were overweight.
- One in five children (20.3%) entering kindergarten were overweight or obese in a random sample of children's health records, according to a review by the RI Department of Health's Immunization Program in 2004-2005. This rate has increased by 17% since 2001-2002.

Physical Activity

- According to the 2001 HIS, nearly two in five RI children ages six to ten (39.3%) do not exercise.
- Only 42% of RI high school students and 55% of RI middle school students in 2007 had sufficient levels of physical activity (at least 60 minutes per day, at least 5 days a week) (RI Youth Risk Behavior Survey).
- In 2006-07, 30% of high school students, 27% of middle school students, and 28% of upper elementary school students in RI watched 3 or more hours of television on an average school day (SALT Student Survey).
- In addition, 16% of high school students, 18% of middle school students, and 18% of upper elementary school students spent 3 or more hours per day playing computer or video games (SALT Student Survey).

Nutrition

- Only 7% of high school students, 11% of middle school students, and 13% of elementary school students in RI reported eating the recommended five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day, in 2006-07 (SALT Student Survey).
- In 2007, less than one in six RI high school students (18%) reported drinking the recommended three or more glasses of milk per day, a significant decline from previous years (RI YRBS).

^{*} For the statistics above obese is defined as having a Body Mass Index (BMI) at or above the 95th percentile, by age and sex based on reference data from NHANES. Overweight is defined as having a BMI at or above the 85th but below the 95th percentile. BMI = weight in kilograms / (height in meters)²