

REPORT BRIEF • SEPTEMBER 2006

PROGRESS IN PREVENTING CHILDHOOD OBESITY: HOW DO WE MEASURE UP?

Over the past few decades, a steady and dramatic increase in obesity has occurred throughout the entire U.S. population, particularly among children and youth. Currently, one third of American children and youth are either obese or at risk of becoming obese. Over the past 30 years, the obesity rate has nearly tripled for children ages 2–5 years (from 5 to 14 percent) and youth ages 12–19 years (from 5 to 17 percent), and quadrupled for children ages 6–11 years (from 4 to 19 percent).

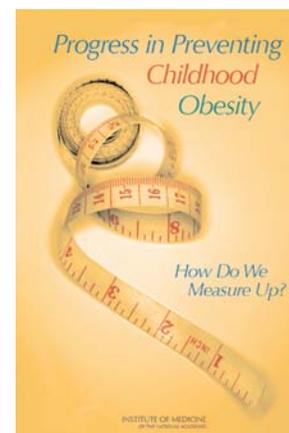
The country is beginning to recognize childhood obesity as a major public health epidemic that will incur substantial costs to the nation. However, the current level of investment by the public and private sectors still does not match the extent of the problem. There is a substantial underinvestment of resources to adequately address the scope of the obesity crisis when compared to the expressed concern for and commitment to possible infectious disease outbreaks or bioterrorism events.

EFFECTIVELY RESPONDING TO THE OBESITY EPIDEMIC

Questions remain about how to effectively address the growing obesity epidemic. First, what can we do about it? Second, how do we track and evaluate the nation's response so that effective policies, programs, and initiatives can be replicated, adapted or refined, scaled-up, and disseminated?

The 2005 Institute of Medicine (IOM) report *Preventing Childhood Obesity: Health in the Balance* addressed the first question by offering a blueprint to guide concerted actions for many stakeholders including government, industry, media, communities, schools, and families. Many childhood obesity prevention policies and programs are currently underway to increase physical activity and promote healthful eating among children and youth. These interventions, however, generally remain fragmented and small-scale. Moreover, the lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation have hindered the development of an evidence base to identify, apply, and disseminate lessons learned and support promising childhood obesity prevention efforts.

To extend the reach and impact of the *Health in the Balance* report, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation requested that IOM convene an expert committee to examine the nation's progress in preventing childhood obesity. This report, *Progress in Preventing Childhood Obesity: How Do We Measure Up?*, presents a call to action for key stakeholders to lead and commit to childhood obesity prevention, evaluate policies and programs, monitor progress, and disseminate promising practices.



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NEXT STEPS FOR CONFRONTING THE CHILDHOOD OBESITY EPIDEMIC

GOVERNMENT

- Federal, state, and local governments should each establish a high-level task force on childhood obesity prevention to identify priorities for action, coordinate public-sector efforts, and establish effective interdepartmental collaborations.
- The federal government should provide a sustained commitment and long-term investment in childhood obesity prevention initiatives found to be effective and to national surveillance efforts to track trends in the obesity epidemic.
- State and local governments should demonstrate leadership for childhood obesity prevention by committing adequate resources and developing policies that lead to changes supporting a healthy school environment and healthy communities.

INDUSTRY AND MEDIA

- Independent and periodic evaluations of industry's efforts to promote healthy lifestyles should be conducted.
- Industry should engage in a collaborative process to develop and strengthen public-private partnerships that support childhood obesity prevention efforts, and include creating a mechanism for sharing proprietary data that can expand understanding of how marketing influences children's and youths' attitudes and behaviors, and developing a sustainable funding strategy to inform interventions.
- Media should evaluate progress in developing and communicating storylines and programming that promote healthy lifestyles.
- Media should evaluate existing efforts regarding childhood obesity prevention

with the goal of developing, coordinating, and evaluating a more comprehensive long-term, national multimedia and public relations campaign focused on obesity prevention in children and youth.

COMMUNITIES

- Communities should develop a community health index toolkit through government-academic-community partnerships to assist in examining factors relevant to creating healthy communities.
- Communities should compile and widely share community-based evaluation results, lessons learned, and community action plans.

SCHOOLS

- Schools should bolster physical-education and physical-activity requirements, standards, and efforts in preschool, child-care, and after-school programs.
- Schools should be provided with adequate and sustained resources through federal and state government funding to implement relevant changes in the school environment to increase physical activity and the availability and consumption of foods and beverages that support a healthful diet.

HOME

- Families should assess the home environment to ensure that foods and beverages supporting a healthful diet are consumed by children and youth at home and served in reasonable portion sizes.
- Families should emphasize physical activity as a family priority and establish rules or guidelines that limit leisure screen time (e.g., television, DVDs or videos, movies, video games, and computers).

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

Copies of *Progress in Preventing Childhood Obesity: How Do We Measure Up?* are available from the National Academies Press, 500 Fifth Street, N.W., Lockbox 285, Washington, DC 20055; (800) 624-6242 or (202) 334-3313 (in the Washington metropolitan area); Internet, <http://www.nap.edu>. The full text of this report is available at <http://www.nap.edu>.

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