

## Obesity in Early Childhood:

### More Than 40% of Head Start Children in NYC Are Overweight or Obese

Obesity is epidemic in New York City, and it begins early in life. Being obese in childhood increases the likelihood of adult obesity, which is associated with diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, and cancer.

Nationally, rates of obesity among children ages 6 to 11 more than doubled over the past 2 decades, from 7% in 1980 to 16% in 2002. In 2003, a New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and Department of Education survey found that as early as kindergarten, 21% of children were obese.

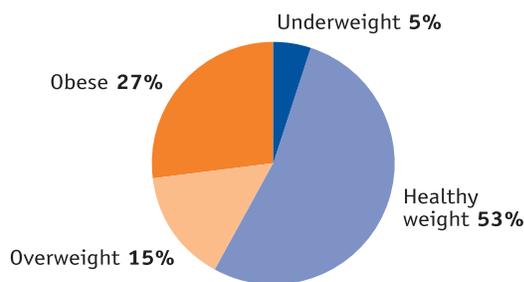
To better understand the prevalence of obesity in early childhood, the Health Department and New

York City Administration for Children's Services/Head Start reviewed records of children enrolled in Head Start as of October 2004.

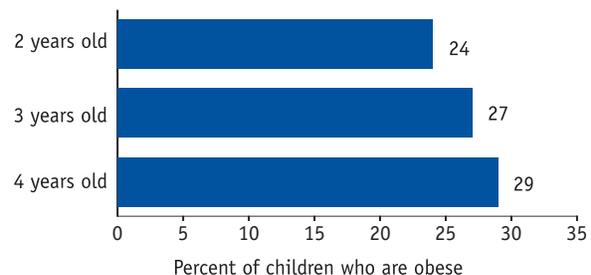
This report summarizes results and outlines obesity prevention strategies for families and providers.

Head Start is a comprehensive child development program that serves preschool children and families living below the poverty line. Demographic data and measured heights and weights were collected from physical exam forms filled out by the child's health care provider and submitted upon initial Head Start enrollment. Records from over 16,000 children showed that 51% of the population was female, 55% Hispanic, and 28% African-American; mean age was 3.5 years. Weight status was calculated based on a child's weight adjusted for height, age, and sex.

### In New York City, 27% of Head Start children are obese\*



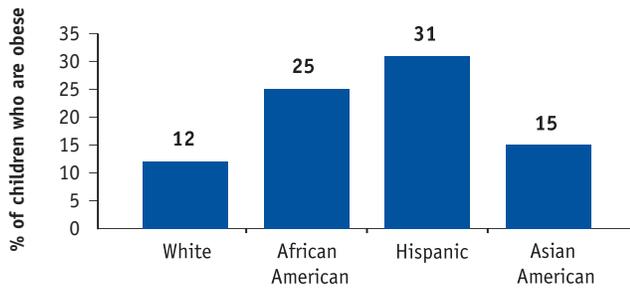
- Among Head Start children, 27% were obese, 15% were overweight, 53% were a healthy weight, and 5% were underweight.



- About 1 in 4 Head Start children is obese at age 2; by age 4, almost 1 in 3 is obese.

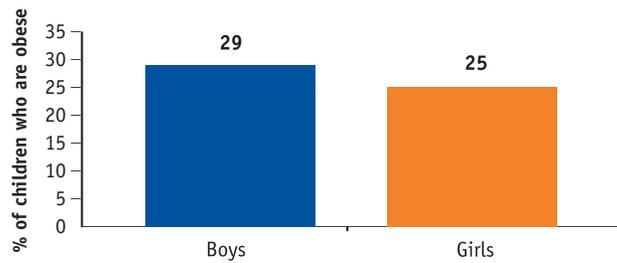
\* Among children, obesity is defined as a body mass index (BMI)  $\geq$  95th percentile for age and gender; overweight is defined as BMI  $\geq$  85th and  $<$  95th percentile for age and gender. BMI is intended only to serve as a screening tool. Health care professionals should determine a healthy weight range for each child. To learn more about how obesity is defined in children, visit: [www.cdc.gov/growthcharts/](http://www.cdc.gov/growthcharts/).

While obesity is a problem among all Head Start children, Hispanic and African American children are most affected



- In Head Start, almost 1 in 3 Hispanic and 1 in 4 African American children is obese.

Obesity affects both boys and girls in Head Start



- Boys in Head Start have a slightly higher obesity rate (29%) than girls (25%).

## Recommendations

Overweight and obesity occur when children eat more calories than they use. Here are tips for parents, families and teachers to help children reach a healthy weight.

### Physical Activity:

- Children should spend at least 1 hour a day being physically active.
- Limit children to no more than 1 hour a day of TV and video games, and no TV before age 2. Don't eat while watching TV.

### Healthy Eating:

- Serve children smaller portions appropriate for their age. To learn more, visit: [www.usda.gov/cnpp/KidsPyra/PyrBook.pdf](http://www.usda.gov/cnpp/KidsPyra/PyrBook.pdf).
- Children ages 1 to 6 should drink ONLY water, milk and 100% fruit juice, and no soda or beverages with added sugar; limit juice to 4 to 6 ounces per day, and switch to 1% milk and low-fat dairy products for children age 2 and older.
- Prepare more healthy meals at home and offer children fruits and vegetables at every meal and snack. For recipes, visit: [www.usda.gov/cnpp/Pubs/Cookbook/thriftym.pdf](http://www.usda.gov/cnpp/Pubs/Cookbook/thriftym.pdf).
- Children should eat less junk food, sweets, and fast food (no more than once a week).



Call 311 or visit [nyc.gov/health](http://nyc.gov/health) for a booklet with more proven tips for parents.

A report from New York City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and Administration for Children's Services/Head Start

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