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**BUCKING NATIONAL TRENDS, MAYOR BLOOMBERG ANNOUNCES
SIGNIFICANT DROP IN NEW YORK CITY CHILDHOOD OBESITY RATES**

*Decrease Comes After Years of Aggressive Nutrition and Exercise Programs, Most Dramatic
Decline Seem Amongst 5-6 Year Olds*

New Interagency Task Force to Continue Citywide Success at Obesity Reduction

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services Linda I. Gibbs, Health Commissioner Dr. Thomas A. Farley and Schools Chancellor Dennis M. Walcott announced today that, following years of pioneering policies to improve child nutrition and encourage exercise, obesity rates among New York City public elementary and middle school students have decreased over the past five school years across all race and ethnic groups. This marks the biggest decline in childhood obesity reported to date by any large city in the country and stands in sharp contrast to the stagnant nationwide rates. The overall obesity rates among NYC kindergartners through eighth graders decreased 5.5 percent with the sharpest decline seen among children ages 5 to 6 years old. The declining rates were measured through NYC FITNESSGRAM, a fitness assessment and reporting program for New York City youth in kindergarten through twelfth grade, and are being released today in the Centers for Disease Control's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. Building on the City's groundbreaking standards for beverage vending machines that are already in place, Mayor Bloomberg issued new City standards today to ensure that food vending machines at city buildings are stocked with healthier options and Deputy Mayor Gibbs and Deputy Mayor of Operations Cas Holloway also announced the creation of a multi-agency task force charged with recommending innovative solutions for further progress in combating obesity. Mayor Bloomberg also acknowledged the role the City Council is playing in our efforts to fight obesity, notably our partnership with Speaker Christine C. Quinn, Council Member Maria del Carmen Arroyo, Chair of the Health Committee and Council Member Robert Jackson, Chair of the Education Committee. The Mayor made the announcement at the school cafeteria salad bar at P.S. 218 in the Bronx, where he was joined by Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., New York City Housing Authority Chairman John B. Rhea, Department of Design and Construction Commissioner David J. Burney FAIA, Food Policy Coordinator Kim Kessler and Human Resources Executive Deputy Commissioner Cecile Noel.

"This year our city saw a record decrease in the number of New Yorkers who smoke, and now we have even more good news about New Yorkers' health," said Mayor Bloomberg. "Even

(more)

as childhood obesity in the rest of the nation has remained flat or gotten worse, in New York City, it is declining. Children who are more physically fit have fewer health problems – and fewer trips to the hospital. That’s great news for kids and their families, and for taxpayers too. Over the past decade our administration has pioneered to new health intervention strategies, and that work is clearly paying off.”

“Today’s announcement is truly exciting,” said Speaker Christine C. Quinn. “Reducing childhood obesity and diet-related disease requires real coordination across City agencies and community partners. That’s why 5 years ago we created the position of Food Policy Coordinator. We needed someone to create and implement a comprehensive strategy that raised nutrition standards in schools, improved healthy food options in our communities - through programs like Green Carts and FRESH - and created education programming to support kids ability to make healthy choices. It’s gratifying to see data that shows our strategy is paying off.”

“These numbers are good news, and represent a great first step towards a healthier New York. The obesity crisis in the Bronx and throughout the city puts our children at serious risk of chronic illnesses,” said Bronx Borough President Diaz Jr. “While I am glad to see a drop in childhood obesity rates, there is still a lot of work to do, and my office will continue to work with this administration and others to help our children, and our adults, make healthier eating choices. I applaud Mayor Bloomberg, Deputy Mayors Gibbs and Holloway, and Commissioner Farley for their continued commitment to keeping our City’s residents of all ages healthy.”

“We know that healthy – or unhealthy behaviors – begin in childhood, which is why it’s critical that kids are exposed early on to nutritious food and exercise,” said Deputy Mayor Gibbs. “Over the last decade, New York City has been at the forefront of providing kids with healthier food, more opportunities for exercise and exposure to an overall healthier lifestyle. It is gratifying to see our efforts resulting in a lower obesity rate, in sharp contrast to the flat or upward trends we see elsewhere in the nation.”

”Many New Yorkers struggle with obesity, but today’s numbers show that with sustained effort, it is a struggle we can win,” said Deputy Mayor Cas Holloway. “This new task force will bring the full force of the city’s resources and creativity to bear in the effort to continue and accelerate our success—which will improve the quality of life for the thousands of New Yorkers.”

“After decades of increases in childhood obesity, we are very much encouraged to see obesity rates going down,” said Health Commissioner Farley. “Fewer New York City children are reaching dangerous weight levels that would put them at much greater risk for lifelong health problems such as diabetes and heart disease. We believe the many steps we have taken to reverse the obesity epidemic have helped. While we believe we are on the right track, we have much more work to do to further reduce obesity rates of children and adults.”

“In New York City schools, we’re encouraging healthy eating habits and daily exercise from the start,” said Chancellor Walcott. “We have improved the healthfulness of the food we serve in cafeterias and removed sugary drinks from school vending machines. These simple changes make a real difference in minimizing weight gain among our kids and also help create patterns of healthy living that our students can carry with them into the future.”

Today's Health Department report, being released in the Centers for Disease Control's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, measured childhood obesity through the NYC FITNESSGRAM, a fitness assessment and reporting program for New York City youth in kindergarten through twelfth grade. It shows that the overall obesity rates among NYC kindergartners through eighth graders (children ages 5 through 14) decreased 5.5 percent from 21.9 percent in 2006-07 to 20.7 percent in 2010-11. The sharpest decline was seen among children ages 5 to 6 years old, with a close to 10 percent drop to 18.2 percent in 2010-11 from 20.2 percent in 2006-07.

The NYC FITNESSGRAM, started in 2005, is a 'report card' measuring a child's fitness – including Body Mass Index (BMI), muscular strength and endurance, flexibility and aerobic capacity – that teachers send home to parents with recommendations on how whole families can get active, eat right and maintain a healthy weight. Results show the relationship between fitness and academic achievement: overall, students in the top 5 percent in NYC FITNESSGRAM score 36 percentile points higher on standardized tests than students in the bottom 5 percent in NYC FITNESSGRAM.

To combat high obesity rates, the City's Departments of Education and Health have instituted creative programs, such as Move-To-Improve. Started in 2009, Move-To-Improve, designed to help elementary schools reach 120 minutes per week of physical education, is an engaging way to help teachers integrate physical activity into the classroom via 10minute fitness breaks throughout the school day.

The Department of Education has been providing healthier foods that appeal to kids, stocking salad bars with fresh produce, eliminating deep frying of foods and making water more accessible by adding more than 200 water jets to school cafeterias. Additionally, the city's schools have shifted from serving whole milk to low-fat milk, saving our students 4.5 billion extra calories in 2008. As of this year, beverage vending is limited to drinks with 10 calories per 8 ounces in elementary schools and 25 calories per 8 ounces in high schools, and snack vending includes a limit of 200 calories per item in addition to other nutritional criteria. The Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City has also launched a NYC School Salad Bar Initiative to help fund additional low-height salad bars in targeted elementary schools across the five boroughs. Salad bars have been shown to help increase consumption of fresh produce and can feature ingredients grown in a school garden (complementing Grow to Learn: the Citywide School Gardens Initiative).

The City has also made nutrition and physical activity changes in early child care settings, contributing to the decline in obesity among 5 to 6 year-olds. These changes include limiting TV screen time, serving low-fat milk to all children over two years of age, restricting sugary drinks and making water available and accessible throughout the day. These centers must also offer 60 minutes of physical activity per day.

The new food vending standards introduced today will apply to all City facilities, represent the City's latest effort to encourage healthy eating and will serve as a model for private employers to follow. Calories from snacks comprise 24% of daily calorie intake for adults, on average. These new standards will limit calories, saturated fat, trans fat, sodium and sugar in products and increase the availability of healthier options in machines. Under the new rules, only snacks with fewer than 200 calories and less than 7 grams of fat will be offered.

Despite the encouraging trends and program and policy changes, one in five children in grades K-8 is still obese and minority children and those living in poor neighborhoods still show higher obesity rates. The greatest decreases in obesity prevalence were observed among white children (a 12.5 percent drop) and Asian/Pacific Islander children (a 7.6 percent drop). Declines were smaller among black (1.9 percent) and Hispanic (3.4 percent) children. Among 5 and 6 year olds, large differences were observed in obesity reduction by school neighborhood poverty levels with higher decreases in low poverty areas than in high poverty areas.

To sustain, and improve upon, the decline, the new task force will be considering a variety of strategies, including increasing the use of public spaces for physical activity and urban agriculture; health and wellness programs and opportunities for City employees; reducing consumption of items linked to obesity; and increasing outreach to encourage the adoption of model employer policies around food. With the goal of ensuring full city-wide and agency participation, the task force will include ten commissioners, including members of Health and Education Departments, Health and Hospitals Corporation, Human Resources Administration, Parks Department, Department of Transportation, Department of Design and Construction, Department of Buildings, New York City Housing Authority, and City Planning.

Obesity is defined by a body mass index (BMI), which is a way of measuring how much excess weight a person has after accounting for how tall they are. A healthy BMI is defined as between the 5th and 85th percentile for a child's gender and age, an overweight BMI is defined as above the 85th and below the 95th percentile for a child's gender and age and an obese BMI is defined at or above the 95th percentile for gender and age. More information about how to calculate BMI for children is available on the CDC website. Many serious health conditions are related to being overweight or obese, such as asthma, depression, diabetes, high blood pressure, respiratory problems and heart disease. Childhood obesity also increases the likelihood of adult obesity.

Additional City programs include:

- Playstreets, which are single blocks of quieter streets that are closed to cars and opened up to children and families for active play. Schools are using Playstreets to create more active playspaces for recess and physical education. Community Playstreets are also occurring during the summertime to provide children and families with active playspaces in our underserved neighborhoods.
- The Active Design Guidelines and its physical-activity promoting strategies that the School Construction Authority is integrating into its guidelines for school construction and renovations.
- The Health Department's "Pouring on the Pounds" campaign reminds adults and children alike about the calories associated with sugar-sweetened beverages and encourages drinking lower calorie beverages such as water, unsweetened tea, or low-fat milk.

The Health Department advises parents to practice the following steps to help themselves and their children maintain a healthy weight:

- Children learn from watching their parents. Eat fruits and vegetables and children will too.
- Give children fruits and vegetables at every meal and snack. Sometimes children do not take to new foods right away, so offer new fruits and vegetables many times.
- Instead of sugary drinks, serve water, seltzer, low-fat milk or soy milk. If juice is consumed, limit to no more than 6 ounces of 100 percent juice per day.
- Be active with children. Make sure they get at least an hour of physical activity every day (even if in multiple short intervals), by walking with them to school, playing in the playground or riding bikes. Find other recreational activities in your neighborhood by searching “BeFit” on NYC.gov.

For more information on maintaining a healthy weight for whole family, search “healthy eating” or “obesity” on NYC.gov or visit Eating Healthy NYC on Facebook. To support public programs promoting nutrition and healthy eating, such as the NYC Salad Bar Initiative and Grow to Learn: the Citywide School Gardens Initiative, contact the Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York City. Recent donors to the NYC Salad Bar Initiative include Agnes Gund. For more information and to get involved, please go to www.nyc.gov or call 311.

Additional Quotes

“Emphasizing good nutrition and exercise is invaluable in the life of a child, especially in view of the many diseases associated with poor eating habits and lack of exercise, such as obesity, diabetes and heart disease,” said New York City Housing Authority Chairman Rhea. “NYCHA serves over 115,000 youth citywide and we believe that through education, programs and events such as the Annual NYCHA Kids Walk we can improve the quality of life of our residents and help future generations overcome disparities in health commonly found in low-income communities.”

“The Department of Design and Construction is working with the Department of Health and other City agencies to promote ‘Active Design’ as a means of increasing opportunities for physical activity in the design of public works,” said Design and Construction Commissioner Burney FAIA. “With the publication of the City’s ‘Active Design Guidelines’ the City is encouraging all New Yorkers to become more active and reduce the likelihood of obesity and its related health problems.”

“In our work to advance the City’s food policy agenda, our office has learned that collaboration leads to innovation,” said Food Policy Coordinator Kim Kessler. “I am looking forward to working with the dynamic group of agencies represented on the task force and finding new ways to promote physical activity and healthy eating as everyday options for all New Yorkers.”

“The primary goal of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is to supplement a daily diet with nutritious foods, such as fruits and vegetables,” said HRA Commissioner Robert Doar. “Poor eating habits often begin at a young age and end up costing taxpayers through higher Medicaid costs. The reduction of obesity rates in low-income neighborhoods is a trend in

the right direction, and HRA will continue to encourage low-income families to use their food stamp benefits to make healthier choices.”


“One of the hallmarks of this administration has been the struggle against childhood obesity and it is gratifying that rates are on the decline,” said Parks & Recreation Commissioner Adrian Benepe. “From building new and improved athletic facilities, to providing free fitness and swimming classes at our parks, pools and recreation centers, we are committed to ensuring that New York City’s children have access to programs that will lead them toward living more healthy lives.”

“Obesity and other diet-related diseases are a critical issue facing the health of our city,” said City Planning Commissioner Amanda M. Burden. “At City Planning, we are working to combat obesity with the FRESH program, which provides incentives for neighborhood grocery stores that sell fresh food to open in underserved communities with high rates of diet-related diseases. We also worked with our partnering agencies to create the Active Design Guidelines, which offers new ways for New Yorkers to become more active. These initiatives are all part of our strategic plan to create complete neighborhoods, with places to live, work, shop and socialize all within walkable, bikeable communities.”

“New York City’s streets are safer and more inviting than ever, offering unprecedented opportunities to get around actively on foot or on two wheels,” said Transportation Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan. “Our education and engineering campaigns and our new ‘Walk Ways’ program that customizes walk-to-school routes are helping schoolchildren develop healthy transportation habits on increasingly safe streets.”

- 30 -

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