

ALASKA OBESITY FACTS: EARLY CHILDHOOD OBESITY (0-5 YEARS OLD)

WHY BE CONCERNED ABOUT EARLY CHILDHOOD OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY?

- 10% of children less than 2 years old in the U.S. have a high weight-for-length ratio and 21% of children age 2-5 are overweight or obese.¹
- 31% of low income preschoolers (2-4 year olds) in the U.S. are overweight or obese.²
- One-third of obese preschool children and about half of obese school-age children become overweight adults.³
- Excessive and rapid weight gain in the first years of life can increase the risk of obesity and chronic disease later in life.⁴
- Some medical conditions associated with obesity in adults have been diagnosed in obese children, including type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, fatty liver, sleep apnea, and musculoskeletal and psychosocial disorders.⁵

BODY MASS INDEX (BMI) is used to identify risk of weight related health problems, and is calculated from height and weight. BMI for children ages 2-19 years is plotted on an age- and sex-specific growth chart. A BMI calculator for children and teens can be found at <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/dnpabmi/>.

Measurements of children less than two years are plotted on weight-for-length or weight-for-height growth charts. Growth charts can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/growthcharts/>.

EARLY CHILDHOOD WEIGHT STATUS IN ALASKA

Statewide representative weight status data for children younger than high school age are only available for 3-year-olds. Several different programs in the state maintain or collect height and weight records for children in target populations. The data described below provide the best estimates available of early childhood overweight and obesity in Alaska.

- **Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program** collects measured height and weight on low income infants and children served by the program.⁶
- **Childhood Understanding Behaviors Survey (CUBS)** is a representative survey of all 3-year-olds who were born in Alaska. Child height and weight data are self-reported by the mother.⁷
- **Alaska Oral Health Basic Screening Survey** collects measured height and weight on a sample of kindergarteners from around the state.⁸

PREVALENCE OF OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY AMONG CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN THE WIC PROGRAM, CUBS, AND THE ALASKA ORAL HEALTH BASIC SCREENING SURVEY, ALASKA



- Although data come from different populations in Alaska, all indicate that a substantial proportion of Alaska's young children are overweight or obese.

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What Can Alaska Child Care Providers, Worksites & Communities Do?⁴

- **Child Care Providers:** Follow the evidence-based recommendations for physical activity; meals, snacks and beverages; TV and computer time; and infant feeding.
- **Worksites:** Since breastfeeding is associated with reduced risk of childhood obesity, adopt policies that allow employees time to breastfeed infants or express milk in a private setting during work hours.
- **Communities:** Support parents' efforts to be healthy by promoting healthy environments in settings outside the home where young children spend substantial time.

What Can Health Care Providers Do?⁴

- Assess, monitor, and track growth from birth to age 5.
- Give consistent evidence-based nutrition and physical activity messages for all children regardless of weight status.

What Can Individuals Do?⁴

- Maintain a healthy pre-pregnancy weight and keep weight gain during pregnancy within the limits recommended by your health care provider.
- Breast milk only (no food or formula) for your infant's first 6 months. Continue breastfeeding as you introduce healthy foods for the first year or more.
- Serve your child a variety of healthy foods and be physically active with your child.
- No screen time during the first 2 years of life; then limit screen time to less than two hours per day.
- Make sure your child gets enough sleep.

The following are required of licensed child care facilities in Alaska⁹:

- At least 20 minutes of vigorous physical activity for every three hours the facility is open between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.
- Limit television, movie viewing, and computer and video game use to one and one-half hours total in a 24-hour period, except for special occasions.
- Limit computer learning activities to two hours a day.
- Ensure that snacks and meals meet the federal child care food program requirements. The USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) requirements can be found at:
www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/care/ProgramBasics/Meals/Meal_Patterns.htm.

In addition, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 requires¹⁰:

- Drinking water is accessible to children at all times.
- Only fat-free or low-fat milk is served to children 2 years of age and older.

References

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www.hss.state.ak.us/dph/chronic/obesity

