



Quick Facts About Childhood Obesity

In the United States, the percentage of children affected by obesity has more than tripled since the 1970's. Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that nearly one in five school age children is obese.

Without intervention, obese infants and young children will likely continue to be obese throughout childhood and into adolescence and adulthood. The CDC's 2017 data brief clearly illustrates this truth: breaking down the numbers, 14% of two to five year old's were obese; 18% of six to eleven year old's; and 21% of 12 – 19 year old's faced this life-threatening problem. Because obese children are more likely to develop a variety of serious health problems and chronic conditions, including cardiovascular disease, premature onset of illnesses and diabetes.

Orange County mirrors the national trend, with nearly one in five (18.6%) of all 5th grade students who are obese.

Complicating matters locally, large ethnic disparities exist among children who are obese. According to 2018 statistics from the California Department of Education (CDE), nearly one-third – 27 percent – of Hispanic fifth-graders suffer from obesity, compared to 10 percent and 8 percent for Caucasian and Asian fifth-graders, respectively. The CDE data also points out local disparities in socioeconomic status, with the lowest childhood obesity prevalence among the highest income group.

These national and local trends are alarming. The good news is that the obesity epidemic is reversible!

In light of the indisputable link between obesity and many chronic diseases, the need for increased prevention, education, and access to healthy foods and safe, walkable neighborhoods is immense.

Why You Should Care

- The obesity epidemic is reversible! Community efforts focused on supporting healthy eating and active living can change the lives of children and move the needle on stubborn obesity statistics.
- Childhood obesity is recognized as one of the greatest public health threats facing today's children.
- Children with obesity have three times more healthcare expenditures than children at healthy weights, costing an estimated \$14 billion every year.
- Obesity in childhood is associated with a wide range of serious health complications that progress into adulthood, including diabetes and heart disease, and can dramatically reduce life expectancy.
- Obese adolescents have a 70 percent likelihood of becoming obese adults.
- Obese children stand a greater risk of social and psychological problems, such as poor self-esteem, which can continue into adulthood.
- Children with weight issues are more likely to miss school and repeat a grade than children who are at a healthy weight.

First 5 Orange County Position Statement

Obesity threatens the lifelong health, happiness and overall well-being of many of our young children. First 5 Orange County believes that addressing the rates of childhood obesity in Orange County, with a particular focus on the large disparities in rates among different ethnic and socioeconomic groups, is an essential part of making sure every child reaches their full potential.

Action Steps

Our action steps aim to reduce rates of obesity among children in Orange County by:

- Convening and coordinating efforts to equip all providers who serve young children, such as pediatricians, educators, and childcare providers, with simple strategies and a unified message that promotes healthy feeding relationships and behaviors and the importance of physical activity early in a child's life.
- Providing pediatric obesity education opportunities, such as Childhood Obesity Forums, to build a toolkit of prevention and communication strategies for families.
- Partnering with CHOC Children's, the American Academy of Pediatrics' Orange County Chapter and UC Irvine to expand outreach on the importance of early intervention and prevention to childcare providers in both the health care and early learning sectors.
- Exploring further opportunities for investment in training more providers in evidenced-based practices and coaching to promote healthy mealtime behaviors and messaging and make these services accessible to more families in Orange County.