Main Questions

- What proportions of students are overweight or obese in Massachusetts public school districts, and how have the proportions changed between 2009-2014?
- How do the proportions of students who are overweight or obese differ by gender, age and income?
- What are the next steps?

Overview

Childhood obesity is associated with many chronic diseases, such as high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, asthma, and sleep apnea. The American Academy of Pediatrics advises that the body mass index (BMI) of children should be tracked over time, and the Institute of Medicine recommends that school systems track BMI. Since 2009, Massachusetts responded to these recommendations by measuring the BMI of children in grades 1, 4, 7, and 10.

The Bottom Line

The good news is that overall, overweight and obesity actually declined throughout the state’s schoolchildren from 2009 to 2014. This study analyzed trends in overweight and obesity prevalence throughout the state, among districts, and among different gender, age, and income groups.

Study

Public school students in grades 1, 4, 7, and 10 had their body mass index (BMI) calculated in Massachusetts from 2009-2014. This study analyzed trends in overweight and obesity prevalence throughout the state, among districts, and among different gender, age, and income groups.

Spotlight on Results

- Overall: Overweight and obesity decreased by 3 percentage points, from 34.3% in 2009 to 31.3% in 2014.
- Gender: Boys were slightly more overweight and obese, and also had slightly larger decreases.
- Age: 4th graders had the highest rates of overweight and obesity. The greatest increase in rates of overweight and obesity occurred between 1st and 4th grade, with a 17% increase.
- Higher Income: School districts with families with higher income (more than $37,000 per year) had significant reductions in rates of overweight and obesity.
- Lower income: More children (about 40%) of children in school districts with lower income were overweight or obese. The rates in these districts either increased or did not change.
- Disparity: School districts where families had the lowest income had highest rates of overweight and obesity.

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Source


The study was funded by Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Wenjun Li, PhD is associated with the UMass Worcester Prevention Research Center, a member of the Prevention Research Centers Program. It is supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cooperative agreement number 5-U48-DP005031.

Call for Action

Community-based prevention programs should specifically target children in elementary schools in economically disadvantaged communities.