Childhood Obesity Rates Stabilize But More Kids Are Severely Obese

(Newswise) — Childhood obesity rates leveled off during a 14-year period between 1999 and 2012, according to research published in the Journal of the American Medical Association: Pediatrics. But the rate of severe obesity increased, especially in Hispanic girls and black boys, according to the study.

The study indicated that rates have stabilized in recent years, with no significant increases for children 2- to 19-years-old since 2009-2010. The data is from a sample representing nearly 27,000 children who participated in The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, an ongoing, long-term program that assesses the health and nutritional status of adults and children using surveys and physical exams.

“While we would like to say that signs of progress are clear across the country in the fight to decrease obesity rates, the only clear sign is that there is more work to be done,” said Nancy Brown, CEO of the American Heart Association. “While declines are in sight only among young children, the rate of severe obesity is on the rise among teenagers.”

A dramatic 43 percent drop in obesity rates in children ages 2- to 5-years-old between the years 2003 to 2012 was reported in February in a separate analysis of data taken from NHANES. The idea that rates were plunging among preschoolers — heralded in the study and press release from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — did not stand up when researchers scrutinized a few extra years of data, lead author Asheley Cockrell Skinner, assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine, told USA Today.

Researchers say the leveling off could partially be attributed to the increased numbers of children who are severely obese and no longer included in overweight or less severe obesity categories.

More study is needed for a determination about why childhood obesity rates appear to have stabilized in the last few years, they added.

Addressing severe obesity is critical to the long-term health of children in the United States, especially because obesity and severe obesity in adults is expected to increase significantly until 2030, researchers said.

Children who are overweight or obese are more likely to be overweight or obese as adults. In addition, childhood obesity is causing a broad range of health problems previously not seen until adulthood. These include: high blood pressure; Type 2 diabetes; and elevated blood cholesterol levels.

There are also psychological effects. Obese children are more prone to low self-esteem, negative body image and depression. Excess weight in childhood has been linked to higher and earlier death rates in adulthood.

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