



National Center for Health Statistics

Prevalence of Overweight Among Children and Adolescents: United States, 2003-2004

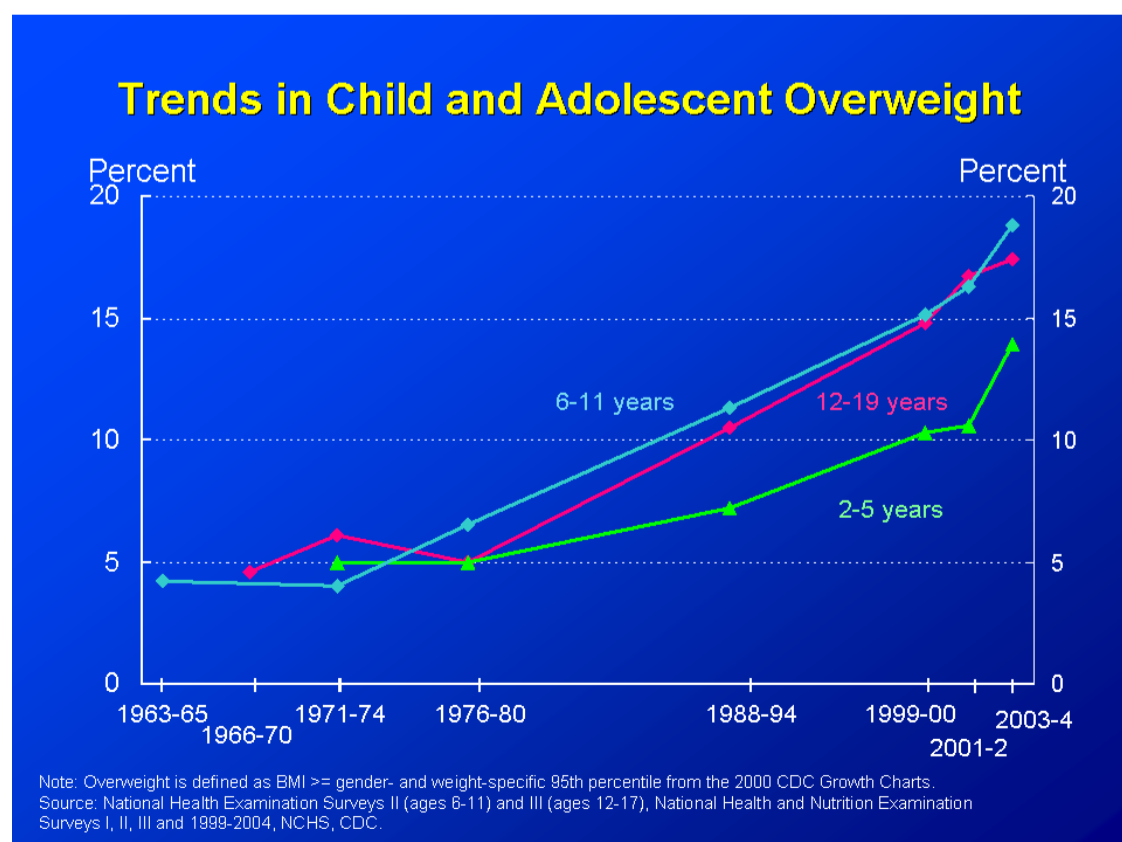
Results from the 2003-2004 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), using measured heights and weights, indicate that an estimated 17 percent of children and adolescents ages 2-19 years are overweight. [Table 1](#) shows that overweight increased from 7.2 to 13.9% among 2-5 year olds and from 11 to 19% among 6-11 year olds between 1988-94 and 2003-2004. Among adolescents aged 12-19, overweight increased from 11 to 17% during the same period.

Body mass index, expressed as weight/height² (BMI;kg/m²) is commonly used to classify overweight and obesity among adults, and is also recommended to identify children who are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight. Cutoff criteria are based on the 2000 CDC BMI-for-age-growth charts for the United States. Based on current recommendations of expert committees, children with BMI values at or above the 95th percentile of the sex-specific BMI growth charts are categorized as overweight.

The NHANES surveys used a stratified, multistage, probability samples of the civilian noninstitutionalized U.S. population. A household interview and a physical examination were conducted for each survey participant. During the physical examination, conducted in mobile examination centers, height and weight were measured as part of a more comprehensive set of body measurements. These measurements were taken by trained health technicians, using standardized measuring procedures and equipment. Observations for persons missing a valid height or weight measurement were not included in the data analysis.

When the overweight definition (greater than or equal to 95th percentile of the age- and sex-specific BMI) is applied to data from earlier national health examination surveys, it is apparent that overweight in children and adolescents was relatively stable from the 1960s to 1980 ([table 1](#)). However, from NHANES II (1976-80) to NHANES III, the prevalence of overweight nearly doubled among children and adolescents. In the time interval between NHANES II and III, the prevalence of overweight among children ages 6-11 years increased from an estimated 7 percent to 11 percent ([figure](#)), and among adolescents ages 12-19 years, increased from 5 percent to 11 percent. One of the national health objectives for 2010 is to reduce the prevalence of overweight from the NHANES III baseline of 11 percent. However, the NHANES 2003-2004 overweight estimates suggest that since 1994, overweight in youths has not leveled off or decreased, and is increasing to even higher levels. The 2003-2004 findings for children and adolescents suggest the likelihood of another generation of overweight adults who may be at risk for subsequent overweight and obesity related health conditions.

Figure



Table

Table 1. Prevalence of overweight among children and adolescents ages 2-19 years, for selected years 1963-65 through 1999-2002

| Age (years) ¹ | NHANES 1963-65 1966-70 ² | NHANES 1971-74 | NHANES 1976-80 | NHANES 1988-94 | NHANES 1999-2000 | NHANES 2001-02 | NHANES 2003-04 |
|--------------------------|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 2-5 | - | 5 | 5 | 7.2 | 10.3 | 10.6 | 13.9 |
| 6-11 | 4.2 | 4 | 6.5 | 11.3 | 15.1 | 16.3 | 18.8 |
| 12-19 | 4.6 | 6.1 | 5 | 10.5 | 14.8 | 16.7 | 17.4 |

¹ Excludes pregnant women starting with 1971-74. Pregnancy status not available for 1963-65 and 1966-70.

² Data for 1963-65 are for children 6-11 years of age; data for 1966-70 are for adolescents 12-17 years of age, not 12-19 years.

For more detailed estimates see:

- Ogden CL, Carroll MD, Curtin LR, McDowell MA, Tabak CJ, Flegal KM. Prevalence of overweight and obesity in the United States, 1999-2004. JAMA 295:1549-1555. 2006.
- Ogden CL, Flegal KM, Carroll MD, Johnson CL. Prevalence and trends in overweight among US children and adolescents, 1999-2000. JAMA 288:1728-32. 2002.

[Fact Sheet](#)

Page last reviewed: November 6, 2015