

News release

May 15, 2012

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Obesity epidemic worsening in Oregon

New data: Physical inactivity, poor nutrition cause increase in obesity

Obesity rates in Oregon have jumped 121 percent among adults since 1990, driven by a lack of physical activity and poor nutrition, a new Oregon Health Authority report has found.

More than 1.76 million people, or 60 percent of the adult population, were overweight or obese in 2009, according to *Oregon Overweight, Obesity, Physical Activity and Nutrition Facts*, developed by OHA's Public Health Division. View the report on the [OHA website](#).

"The story behind these numbers is that in every part of our state, Oregonians are struggling with the health issues that come from this health crisis," said Katrina Hedberg, M.D., M.P.H., state epidemiologist. "Obesity-related illnesses kill about 1,400 Oregonians a year, making obesity the second leading cause of preventable death after smoking."

The Oregon report comes on the heels of a Duke University and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study published online May 7 in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* predicting that obesity rates will rise to 42 percent by 2030. The study also projects that if things stay on their current path, the prevalence of individuals with severe obesity will more than double to 11 percent in that time.

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Addressing the nation's obesity problem was the focus of the CDC's "Weight of the Nation" conference held last week in Washington, D.C., and attended by policy-makers, health officials and researchers. Cable network HBO teamed with the CDC and the National Institutes of Health to produce a documentary series of the same name that began airing May 14.

According to the report, obesity-related chronic diseases cost Oregonians about \$1.6 billion in medical expenses each year, with \$339 million of that paid by Medicare and \$333 million paid by Medicaid. Obese people are estimated to have annual medical costs that are \$1,429 higher than those of non-obese people. Obesity can lead to diabetes, heart conditions, stroke and high blood pressure, taking a toll on families and the health care system.

Reducing overweight and obesity is one of the state's public health priorities. "Our goal is to become one of the healthiest states in the nation, and to do that, we must address the obesity epidemic," said Oregon Public Health Division Director Mel Kohn, M.D., M.P.H. "The best way to do this across the population is to put healthy options, such as eating better, moving more and living tobacco free, within reach, especially where children are concerned."

For example, Kohn said, communities can make access to physical activity opportunities more convenient for people, such as by building bicycling and walking paths, and improving healthful food options by making fruit and vegetables more readily available in workplace cafeterias. "We still have a long way to go, but we're working with education, health care and the private sector to improve access to healthy options for all Oregonians," he said.

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In the face of rising obesity rates, Oregon and the country are addressing the issue on many fronts. As the state works to transform the health system for Medicaid for better health and lower costs, new Coordinated Care Organizations, (CCOs) will bring the ability to engage patients and communities to address preventable conditions such as obesity-related illnesses. For example, the Public Health Division will connect CCOs to local partners that can encourage employers to develop policies in the workplace that help people to manage their weight. And Oregon's Women, Infants, and Children program continues its work to maintain the state's high breastfeeding rate, which reduces risk for diabetes in children and obesity in nursing mothers.

More background on the report

The prevalence of obese adults increased 121 percent from 1990 to 2009. The prevalence of overweight adults (25 to 29 BMI) increased 11 percent, from 32 percent in 1990 to 36 percent in 2009. The sharp rise in obesity versus overweight is significant because it means more people are gaining more weight.

Among Oregon adults with diagnosed diabetes, 82 percent were overweight or obese; 73 percent of adults with a history of heart attacks were overweight or obese. Only 32 percent of those with arthritis met minimum physical activity recommendations. Among youth, obesity increased more than 50 percent between 2001 and 2009. Nearly 27 percent of eighth-graders and 24 percent of 11th-graders were overweight or obese in 2009. Fueling these increases are high rates of physical inactivity and poor nutrition among adults and adolescents:

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- Only 57 percent of adults met minimum physical activity recommendations.
- Fifty-two percent of eighth-graders reported watching TV or using video games, computer games or the Internet for non-school work for three or more hours in an average school day.
- Only 12 percent of 11th-graders said they participated in daily physical education.
- Just 26 percent of adults and 18 percent of 11th-graders ate five or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day.
- Twenty-one percent of eighth-graders drank seven or more soft drinks in the past week. This averages out to a half-gallon per week and more than 2.5 gallons per month.

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