

Youth Obesity in King County

Serious lifelong consequences

Youth obesity has many serious consequences – during youth and throughout life. Youth obesity can lead to high blood pressure, high cholesterol, insulin resistance, and breathing¹⁻³ and joint⁴⁻⁵ problems. Obesity in childhood is likely to continue into adulthood, and increases the risk for serious health conditions such as diabetes and heart disease. In addition, overweight children are more likely to be severely obese as adults.⁶

Obesity is a national problem that has significant costs to the health care system and society as a whole.⁷ The direct medical cost of obesity in adults is estimated at about \$500 million in King County each year,⁸ not including lost work days and lost productivity. In King County, whether our children are likely to be overweight or obese differs by gender, race/ethnicity, and where children live.

Key points

- One in five youth in King County is overweight or obese
- Although steady since 2004, youth obesity rates remain unacceptably high
- Rates are highest among males, youth of color and those in south King County
- Obesity in childhood is likely to continue into adulthood, and increases the risk for diabetes and heart disease

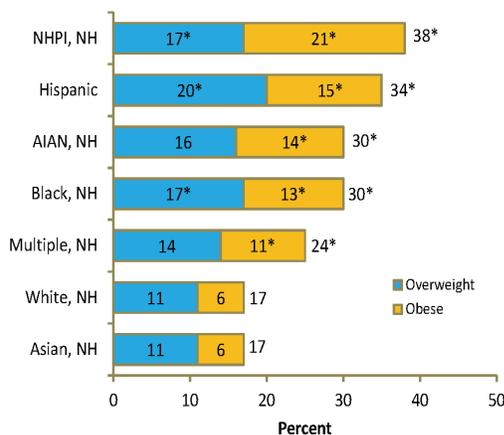
Too many youth have unhealthy weight, boys more than girls

Twenty-one percent of King County youth have unhealthy weight, meaning they are either obese or overweight. In King County, 9% of middle and high school youth (grades 8, 10, and 12) are *obese* and 12% are *overweight*. Boys are nearly twice as likely to be obese and 1.3 times more likely to be overweight than girls. Statewide, 11% of students in these grades are obese, and boys are also more likely to be obese than girls.⁹ Although steady since 2004, youth obesity remains unacceptably high.

The percentage of youth with unhealthy weight differs among our communities

King County youth of color have higher rates of obesity and overweight relative to white youth, similar to the pattern seen nationally. Middle and high school students who are African American, Hispanic/Latino, or American Indian/Alaskan Native are about two times more likely than white, non-Hispanic students to be overweight or obese. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students are also about two times as likely as white, non-Hispanic students to be overweight and three times as likely to be obese.

Figure 1. Teen Overweight and Obesity by Race/Ethnicity King County, WA — 2010



Source: Washington State Healthy Youth Survey

*Statistically significantly higher than white, non-Hispanic students. May not sum to total due to rounding.

Abbreviations: NHPI = Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander; NH = non-Hispanic; AIAN = American Indian/Alaskan Native

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Unhealthy weight among youth is higher in south King County and Seattle

Compared to students in the east region of the county, rates of unhealthy weight among middle and high school students are 1.6 times higher in south region and 1.3 times higher in Seattle. Twenty-five percent of south region students and 21% of Seattle students are overweight or obese, while 16% of east students and 19% of north students are overweight or obese.

Promoting healthy eating and physical activity through strong policies can support youth

Although there is no one simple solution to reverse youth obesity, communities in King County can increase focus on obesity through policies that promote access to healthy foods, decrease access to unhealthy foods like sugary drinks, and support opportunities for physical activity such as safe routes to school. Working together, we can overcome our youth obesity crisis so that our kids can live healthier.

To learn more visit:

Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition
www.copcwa.org

Seattle Children's Hospital
<http://www.seattlechildrens.org/classes-community/community-programs/obesity-program/>

Let's Move
www.letsmove.gov

American Heart Association's Healthier Kids
http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/GettingHealthy/HealthierKids/Healthier-Kids_UCM_304156_SubHomePage.jsp

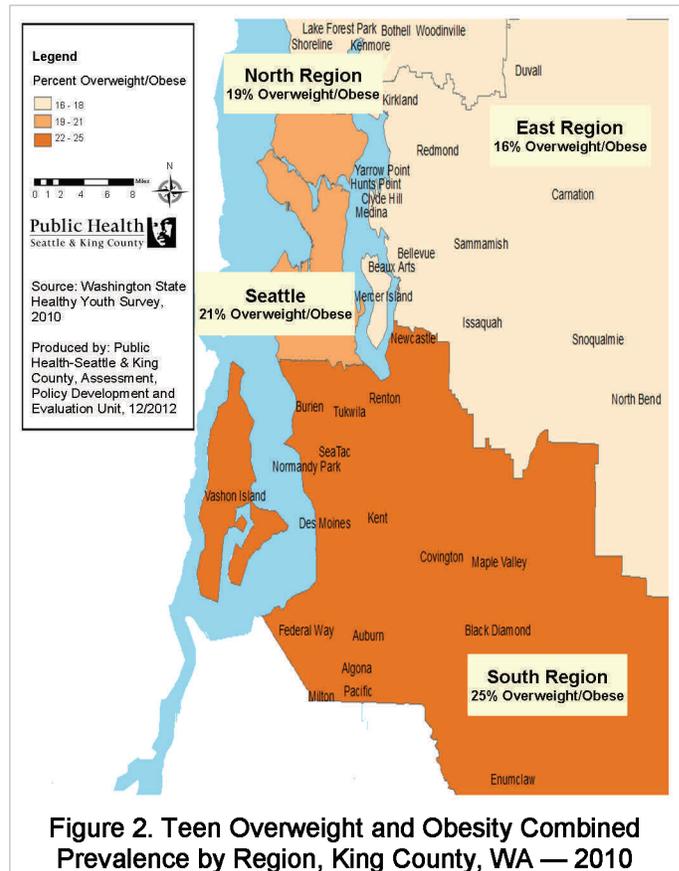


Figure 2. Teen Overweight and Obesity Combined Prevalence by Region, King County, WA — 2010

Data sources and definitions. Local and state youth obesity data are from the Washington State Healthy Youth Survey, a school-based survey conducted every two years in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12, to measure adolescent health risk behaviors. Local data is available since 2004. Measures of youth overweight and obesity are based on body mass index (BMI), calculated as self-reported weight divided by height squared, from students in grades 8, 10, and 12. Among children, obesity¹⁰ is defined as BMI in the top 5% of BMI distribution for children of the same age and gender based on growth charts¹¹ developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; overweight¹⁰ is rated as BMI between the top 5% and 15%.¹² This is a change from 2006 and earlier years, when these categories were called overweight and at risk for overweight, respectively.

References

Public Health Data Watch is produced by the Assessment, Policy Development & Evaluation Unit of Public Health-Seattle & King County and summarizes trends in key health indicators for King County. Myduc Ta, PhD, was the author of this Data Watch. For more information, contact data.request@kingcounty.gov and visit www.kingcounty.gov/health/indicators.