

Overweight, Physical Activity and Nutrition Among Colorado Children and Youth: A Data Resource

Cause for Concern

Over the past three decades, the prevalence of overweight among children and adolescents in the United States has increased dramatically. Excess weight has both immediate and longer-term consequences for the health and well-being of young persons. Unhealthy eating and lack of adequate physical activity contribute to overweight in children and youth. Increased television viewing and use of computers and video games may lead to decreasing levels of physical activity. Unhealthy behaviors learned early in life often persist into adulthood, contributing to development of chronic disease and other causes of death and disability.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has developed national health objectives that identify the most significant preventable threats to health and establish national goals to reduce these threats. All states are working toward achieving these *Healthy People 2010* objectives as a way of improving health over the first decade of the new century, including those that address physical activity, nutrition, and overweight.

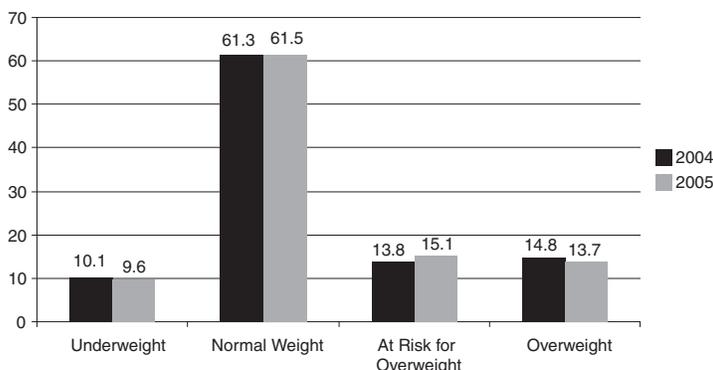
Child Health Survey

In 2004, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, along with other community partners, launched the Child Health Survey. This annual survey provides data on a wide range of health issues and risk factors affecting children and youth in Colorado and is the source of information on Colorado children presented here.

Overweight and At Risk for Overweight

In 2005, an estimated 13.7 percent of Colorado children ages 2-14 were considered to be overweight (Figure 1). An additional 15.1 percent were at risk for being overweight. The *Healthy People 2010* objectives call for no more than 5 percent of children and adolescents to be overweight.

Figure 1. Body Mass Index categories for children ages 2-14, Colorado Child Health Survey, 2004 and 2005



Measuring Weight Status in Children

Body Mass Index (BMI), which is a measure of weight adjusted for height, is used to determine weight categories. However, because children's body composition changes over the years and because girls and boys grow at different rates, BMI for children is age- and gender-specific. BMI-for-age is determined using gender-specific growth charts that place a child in a percentile relative to weight and height. Weight categories, based on these percentiles, are as follows:

Underweight	< 5th percentile
Normal	5th to < 85th percentile
At risk of overweight	85th to < 95th percentile
Overweight	95th percentile and above

Physical Activity, Television Viewing and Computer Use

In 2005, 72.3 percent of Colorado children ages 5-14 participated in some form of physical activity or sports for 5 hours per week or more (Figure 2). An estimated 34.2 percent of children walked or biked to school at least one day per week. Of those who walked or biked to school at least one day a week, 67.0 percent walked or biked 5 days a week. In Colorado in 2005, 80.1 percent of children ages 5-14 watched television, videos, or DVDs for two hours or less per day. Overall, the average amount of time children spent in these activities was one hour and two minutes per day. The U.S. Surgeon General has set a Healthy People 2010 objective of at least 75 percent of adolescents viewing no more than two hours of television per school day. Additionally, 85.7 percent of Colorado children and youth spent less than two hours per day on the Internet or playing computer or video games, with an overall average of 54 minutes of computer time per day.

Nutrition: Fruits, Vegetables, Fast Food and Sugared Beverages

In 2005, 40.6 percent of Colorado children ages 1-14 ate fruit two or more times per day and 7.7 percent of children ate vegetables three or more times per day (Figure 3). The *Healthy People 2010* objectives call for at least 75 percent of adolescents to consume at least two servings of fruit each day and at least 50 percent of adolescents to consume at least three daily servings of vegetables. An estimated 73.0 percent of children ages 1-14 in Colorado consumed soda, sports drinks, or other sugared beverages three or fewer times per week in 2004. Approximately 77.7 percent of children and youth ate fast food one or fewer times per week.

Parental Attitudes Toward School Policy on Physical Activity and Nutrition

In general, Colorado parents of school children strongly supported physical education requirements and healthy food choices in schools in 2005 (Figure 4).

Figure 2. Physical activity, TV viewing and computer use, Colorado Child Health Survey, 2004 and 2005

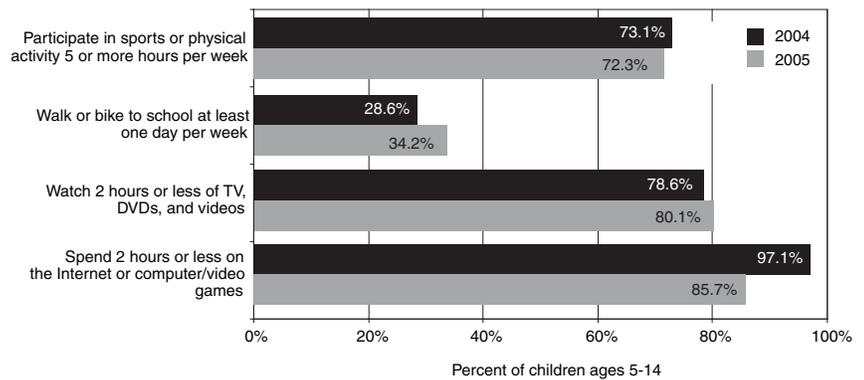


Figure 3. Fruits, vegetables, fast food and sugared beverage consumption, Colorado Child Health Survey, 2004 and 2005

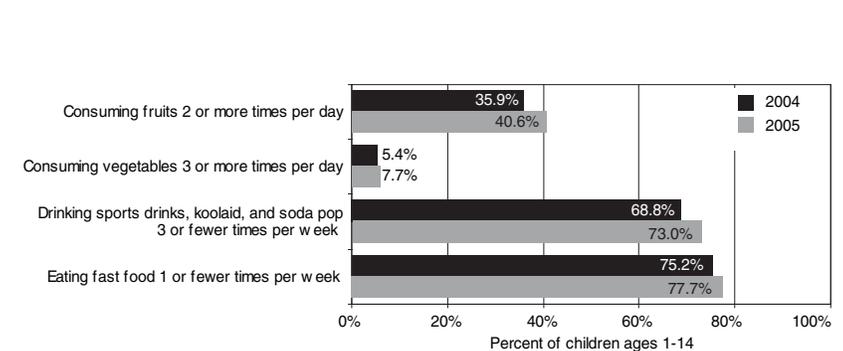
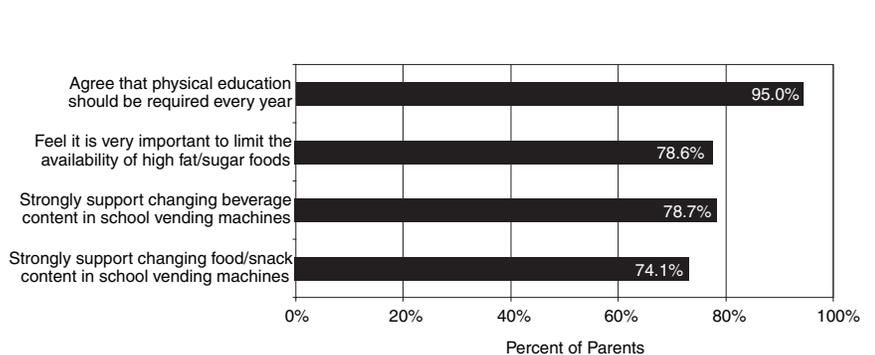


Figure 4. Parental attitudes on select policies in schools, Colorado Child Health Survey, 2005



Child Health Survey Methodology

For further information about the Child Health Survey, visit <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/hs/yrbs/childhealth.html>

Obesity Prevention Efforts in Colorado

For more information about state and local efforts to prevent obesity in Colorado, contact the Colorado Physical Activity and Nutrition (COPAN) Program at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment: (303) 692-2441 or cdphe.pscopan@state.co.us. Visit the COPAN website at <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/COPAN/COPAN.html>.