

# Body Mass Index (BMI) Surveillance FACT SHEET

## The Childhood Obesity Epidemic

Obesity rates among children, adolescents and adults have increased dramatically over the past four decades. Today, nearly **1 in 3** young people in the U.S.—more than 23 million—are overweight or obese and at greater risk for heart disease, type 2 diabetes and other serious health problems.



## Evidence of an Epidemic

- Nationwide, **the obesity rate for children ages 6 to 11 has quadrupled** over the past four decades and rates for other age groups are up dramatically as well. <sup>1</sup>
- Obesity costs the United States an estimated **\$147 billion each year** in medical expenses. <sup>2</sup>
- Eight of the ten states with the **highest rates of obese children are in the South**, <sup>3</sup> and children who live in poor, rural areas are at an even higher risk for being overweight or obese.

## What is Body Mass Index (BMI) Surveillance?

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a ratio of weight and height and is widely believed as a better assessment of obesity than weight alone. BMI surveillance programs calculate a child's BMI based on their sex, age, height and weight and identify those students who are potentially at risk for weight-related health problems. School administrators then provide the information to parents so they can determine whether lifestyle changes should be made for their children.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that BMI be calculated and plotted annually for all youth as part of normal health supervision and the Institute of Medicine recommends annual school-based screenings of BMI.

The Campaign for Healthy Kids supports state policies to collect and analyze BMI data using methods that protect children's privacy.

For more information on BMI Surveillance, visit the CDC Web site at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

### CAMPAIGN FOR HEALTHY KIDS

[www.campaignforhealthykids.org](http://www.campaignforhealthykids.org)

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Endnotes:

1. Ogden C, Carol M and Flegal K. "High Body Mass Index for Age Among US Children and Adolescents, 2003-2006. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 299(20): 2401-2405, May 2008.
2. "Annual Medical Spending Attributable To Obesity: Payer- And Service-Specific Estimates." Eric A. Finkelstein, Justin G. Trogdon, Joel W. Cohen, and William Dietz. *Health Affairs* , Web Exclusive, July 27, 2009
3. Levi, Vinter, Richardson, Laurent, Segal (July 2009). *F as in Fat: How Obesity Policies are Failing America*.