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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

<http://www.hhs.gov>

Obesity Still on the Rise, New Data Show

For Immediate Release
Tuesday, October 8, 2002

Contact: NCHS Press Office (301) 458-4800
CDC Office of Media Relations (404) 639-3286
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[Prevalence of Overweight and Obesity Among Adults: United States, 1999-2000](#)

[Prevalence of Overweight Among Children and Adolescents: United States, 1999-2000](#)

Obesity continued to increase dramatically during the late 1990s for Americans of all ages, with nearly one-third of all adults now classified as obese, according to new data from the 1999-2000 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey published today in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

The data show that 31 percent of adults 20 years of age and over – nearly 59 million people -- have a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or greater, compared with 23 percent in 1994, according to the data collected and analyzed by the National Center for Health Statistics, part of HHS' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Meanwhile, the percent of children who are overweight (defined as BMI-for-age at or above the 95th percentile of the CDC Growth Charts) also continues to increase. Among children and

teens ages 6-19, 15 percent (almost 9 million) are overweight according to the 1999-2000 data, or triple what the proportion was in 1980.

"The problem keeps getting worse," said HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson. "We've seen virtually a doubling in the number of obese persons over the past two decades and this has profound health implications. Obesity increases a person's risk for a number of serious conditions, including diabetes, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, and some types of cancer."

The findings show more adult women are obese (33 percent) than men (28 percent), with the problem greatest among non-Hispanic black women (50 percent) compared with Mexican-American women (40 percent) and non-Hispanic white women (30 percent). There was practically no difference in obesity levels among men based on race/ethnicity.

In addition, over 10 percent of younger preschool children between ages 2 and 5 are overweight, up from 7 percent in 1994.

"One of the most significant concerns from a public health perspective is that we know a lot of children who are overweight grow up to be overweight or obese adults, and thus at greater risk for some major health problems such as heart disease and diabetes," said CDC director Dr. Julie Gerberding. "One critical answer to this problem is that we all must work together to help our children make physical activity a life-long habit."

The data on children also show:

- Non-Hispanic black and Mexican-American adolescents ages 12-19 were more likely to be overweight (24 percent) than non-Hispanic white adolescents (13 percent).
- Mexican-American children ages 6-11 were more likely to be overweight (24 percent) than non-Hispanic black children (20 percent) and non-Hispanic white children (12 percent).
- Preschool-aged non-Hispanic black children were less likely (8 percent) than younger Mexican-American children (11 percent) and non-Hispanic white children (10 percent) to be overweight.

In addition, the data show that another 15 percent of children and teens ages 6 to 19 are considered at risk of becoming overweight (a BMI-for-age from the 85th to the 95th percentile).

More information on the study is available on the [CDC/NCHS Web site](#).

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NOTE: The BMI is a single number that evaluates an individual's

weight status in relation to height. BMI is generally used as the first indicator in assessing body fat and has been the most common method of tracking weight problems and obesity among adults. BMI is a mathematical formula in which a person's body weight in kilograms is divided by the square of his or her height in meters (i.e., $wt/(ht)^2$). The BMI is more highly correlated with body fat than any other indicator of height and weight. The criteria for obesity is the same for both men and women. Someone who is 5'7" is obese at 192 pounds and a person who is 5'11" is obese at 215 pounds. More on this at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/index.htm>

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