

# U.S. obesity rate holding steady, but still high

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(HealthDay)—Obesity rates in the United States appear to be leveling off, but Americans shouldn't think the battle of the bulge is won, health advocates say.

In 25 states adult obesity rates exceeded 30 percent this year, and in five states rates topped 35 percent, according to a new report from the Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Forty-six states had an obesity rate above 25 percent—a sharp contrast to 2000 when no state topped 25 percent, the report noted.

"We're far from out of the woods when it comes to obesity," said John Auerbach, president and CEO of Trust for America's Health.

"But we have many reasons to be optimistic, thanks to parents, educators, business owners, health officials and other local leaders," Auerbach said in a news release from his organization. "Our nation's policymakers must follow their example to build a culture of health."

Adult obesity rates remained stable in most states this year, the report said. Adult obesity even declined in Kansas. However, obesity rates swelled in four states—Colorado, Minnesota, Washington and West Virginia.

"This supports trends that have shown steady levels in recent years," the report authors noted. Last year's report, they said, was the first to document any declines in adult obesity rates, with four states showing signs of slimming down.

Studies of children's weight have also noted a leveling off over the past 10 years, plus a recent drop in the number of obese preschoolers.

"After decades of sharp increases, this counts as a significant achievement," said Nancy Brown, CEO of the American Heart Association. "But with rates still far too high among both [adults](#) and kids, particularly among low-income and minority communities, leaders at all levels of government—local, state and federal—must take action and

build on this progress."

Such progress demands a commitment to healthy school lunches; effective physical education and physical activity; safe streets for walking, biking and playing; and healthy and affordable foods in all neighborhoods, she said.

The heart association also supports taxes on sugary drinks, Brown added.

The report found significant geographic and racial differences in obesity. For instance, nine of the 11 states with the highest [obesity rates](#) are in the South.

West Virginia claimed the nation's highest rate—38 percent of its residents are obese. Colorado has the lowest rates of obesity at 22 percent.

Obesity rates top 40 percent for blacks in 15 states, and exceed 35 percent among Latinos in nine states. Whites, on the other hand, have an obesity rate above 35 percent in only one state, the report said.

The report also found that adults without a college education and with yearly incomes below \$15,000 are far more likely to be obese than their better-educated, better-paid peers.

Also of concern, fitness and weight issues keep 25 percent of young adults from entering the military.

To curb obesity, the [report](#) recommended legislative action, including:

- Full funding of prevention efforts at local, state and federal levels.
- Prioritizing early childhood policies and programs, including

Head Start and the Department of Agriculture's Child and Adult Care Food Program.

- Maintaining current nutrition standards for school foods, and fully implementing menu labeling rules and the updated Nutrition Facts label.
- Investing in nutrition assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and transportation policies that support physical activity.
- Continuing Medicare and Medicaid coverage of services to prevent and treat [obesity](#).

**More information:** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has tips for [keeping kids at a healthy weight](#).

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