

Obesity rates triple among certain states, CDC finds

By Michael Johnsen

ATLANTA (Aug. 4) The number of states with an obesity prevalence of 30% or more tripled in two years to nine states in 2009, according to a CDC Vital Signs report issued Tuesday.

In 2000, no state had an obesity prevalence of 30% or more. The report, "State-Specific Obesity Prevalence Among Adults – United States, 2009," also found no state met the nation's Healthy People 2010 goal to lower obesity prevalence to 15%.

The data found a 110 basis point increase — an additional 2.4 million people — in the self-reported prevalence of obesity between 2007 and 2009 among adults ages 18 years and over. The report also noted the medical costs associated with obesity have climbed. In 2008 dollars, medical costs associated with obesity were estimated at \$147 billion. People who are obese had medical costs that were \$1,429 higher than those of normal weight, the report said.

"Obesity continues to be a major public health problem," stated Center for Disease Control and Prevention director Thomas Frieden. "We need intensive, comprehensive and ongoing efforts to address obesity. If we don't more people will get sick and die from obesity-related conditions such as heart disease, stroke, Type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer, some of the leading causes of death."

The August Vital Signs report is based on new data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. To assess obesity prevalence, approximately 400,000 phone survey respondents were asked to provide their height and weight, which was used to calculate their body mass index. An adult is considered obese if he or she has a BMI of 30 or above.

However, the BRFSS obesity data are underestimates of true obesity prevalence, CDC suggested. Research has found that both men and women often said they are taller than they actually are and women often say they weigh less than they do in telephone surveys. As a result, according to William Dietz, director of CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity, the overall BRFSS obesity prevalence estimate of 26.7% is 720 basis points lower than the national 2007-2008 estimate of 33.9% (nearly 73 million people) from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, for which individuals' height and weight were measured rather than self-reported.

The BRFSS data highlight how obesity affects some populations more than others. The highest prevalence was found among non-Hispanic blacks overall, whose rate was 36.8%, and non-Hispanic black women, whose rate was 41.9%. The rate for Hispanics was 30.7%. The rate among all non-high school graduates was 32.9%. Obesity prevalence also was higher in some regions than others. The South had an obesity prevalence of 28.4 %while the Midwest had a prevalence of 28.2%.

"Obesity is a complex problem that requires both personal and community action," Dietz said. "People in all communities should be able to make healthy choices, but in order to make those choices there must be healthy choices to make. We need to change our communities into places where healthy eating and active living are the easiest path."

The federal government is intensifying its efforts to reduce and prevent obesity through new initiatives such as the First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move! campaign to address childhood obesity and the Communities Putting Prevention to Work program. The CPPW program provides guidance and funding to states and communities to change state and local environments and policies related to diet and physical activity.

For more information on obesity prevalence, including an animated map, visit CDC.gov/vitalsigns or CDC.gov/obesity.

[Click here](#) a transcript of a CDC media briefing regarding obesity.

