ISSUE 3: TRENDS IN OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY AMONG LATINO CHILDREN*

Overweight and obesity rates among all Americans have doubled among adults and tripled among children since 1980.† While overweight and obesity pose a challenge to all children, Latino† children are more likely to experience these conditions than other children. As Latinos represent a rapidly growing share of the U.S. population of children, particularly under age five, the number of overweight and obese children will continue to grow if the underlying causes are not addressed. Obese children are more likely to struggle with obesity throughout adulthood and face poorer health outcomes. As such, child overweight and obesity present serious challenges not only for the Latino community but for the nation.‡

CHILD OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY DEFINED

Researchers define overweight as children whose body mass index (BMI) is greater than the 85th percentile (but lower than the 95th percentile) for age and sex, according to child growth charts developed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Children with a BMI that exceeds the 95th percentile for their age and sex are considered obese. Figures for overweight children include obese children.


Hispanic children are more likely than their peers to be overweight or obese.

• In 2012, 31.8% of all children (ages 2–19) in the United States were overweight and 16.9% were obese.§

• Approximately seven million Latino children were overweight. This means that 38.9% of all Hispanic children were overweight, whereas 35.2% of Black children and 28.5% of White children were overweight.

• Over four million Latino children were considered obese. This means that 22.4% of all Hispanic children were obese. Comparatively, 20.2% of Black children and 14.1% of White children were obese. See Figure 1 for children’s weight statuses for 2011–2012.

![Figure 1: Rates of Children’s Weight Status, Ages 2–19, by Race/Ethnicity, 2011–2012](image_url)


* This profile was authored by Minerva Delgado, Consultant to the Health Policy Project in NCLR’s Office of Research, Advocacy, and Legislation (ORAL), with substantive input, direction, and oversight from Samantha Vargas Poppe, Associate Director, Policy Analysis Center, and Steven Lopez, Manager, Health Policy Project. It is an update of a document originally released in 2010 and authored by Kara D. Ryan. NCLR is the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States. This brief was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The findings and conclusions presented are those of the author and NCLR alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of our funders. Permission to copy, disseminate, or otherwise use information from this paper is granted, provided that appropriate credit is given to NCLR.

† The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race. Furthermore, unless otherwise noted, estimates in this document do not include the 3.7 million residents of Puerto Rico. Comparison data for non-Hispanic Whites and non-Hispanic Blacks will be identified respectively as “Whites” and “Blacks.”


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Hispanic boys are more likely to be obese than Hispanic girls and other boys.

- Obesity rates among Hispanic boys (24.1%) were higher than those for Hispanic girls (20.6%).
- Overall, Hispanic boys (24.1%) were nearly twice as likely to be obese as White boys (12.6%).

Latino infants are more likely than their White peers to be obese.

- According to the CDC, 14.7% of Hispanic infants (under age two) were obese compared to 10.3% of White infants.

While high overall, overweight and obesity rates for Latino children vary throughout stages of childhood.

- Among preschoolers (children ages two to five), more than 29.8% of Latinos were overweight. Of these children, 16.7% of Hispanic preschoolers were obese (twice the national average for this age group).
- By age group 6–11, nearly half (46.2%) of Hispanic children were overweight or obese. Over one-quarter (26.1%) were obese.
- Rates of obesity and overweight improve slightly among older Hispanic children (age group 12–19); 38.1% of Hispanics were overweight or obese and 22.6% of Hispanics were obese. See Figure 2 for rates of overweight and obesity among Latino children, by age group, in 2011–2012.

Latino children are at greater risk of overweight and obesity than other children throughout all stages of their childhood and adolescence. It is clear that without intervention, Latino children of all ages will continue to represent a disproportionate share of the overweight and obese population.

Figure 2:
Rates of Overweight and Obesity Among Hispanic Children by Age Group, 2011-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>% Overweight</th>
<th>% Obese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-11</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-19</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Endnotes
