

SPECIAL REPORT * SPECIAL REPORT * SPECIAL REPORT

CHILDHOOD OBESITY



**How Schools Can Reclaim Leadership
In Helping Combat the Epidemic**

White Paper Presented by Roaring Athletes

Childhood Obesity

How Schools Can Reclaim Leadership in Helping Combat the Epidemic

Each year, unhealthy weight gain and lack of exercise are responsible for the deaths of over 300,000 Americans, annually costing our society nearly \$100 billion. Sadly, what continues to fly somewhat under the radar is that an increasing number of those dying are *children* and *teens*.

In fact, Childhood Obesity has reached epidemic proportions in the United States.



Although overweight and obesity stem from eating more calories than are burned in physical activity, the issue involves a complex interaction between lifestyle, environment and genes. The rise in childhood obesity can be tied to two factors: too little exercise and too many calories.

Children get less exercise:

- ▼ at home because of more time spent with television, video games and computers, and
- ▼ at school because many schools have cut back on physical education classes.

Dangerous Diseases
This means that an alarming number of American youth are at risk for a wide variety of illnesses, including:

- ▼ Heart related problems such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol.
- ▼ Diabetes (Type 2 or insulin resistant).

- ▼ Psychological effects, such as depression and low self-esteem.

According to the World Health Organization, the main contributing factors for this widespread epidemic are a combination of:

- ▼ Increasingly sedentary lifestyles,
- ▼ Hours in front of computers,
- ▼ Televisions and video games,
- ▼ Increased consumption of processed or “fast” food, and
- ▼ A lack of understanding about nutrition.

Children From Low-Income Families Disproportionately Impacted

Particularly troubling is that many children from low-income and inner city families are paying the highest price for obesity. Consider these statistics and circumstances for ongoing failure:

- ▼ The American Heart Association (AHA) cites dire statistics with regard to childhood obesity. An AHA study found that children and adolescents aged 10-17 from families with an income below the poverty line are 74% more likely to be overweight or obese than those from families with a household income at 400% above the poverty line.

○ **Children growing up in unsafe neighborhoods are also at a disadvantage in that they are less likely to be permitted to play with their friends, or even alone, riding a bike, outside.**

- ▼ Statistics cited by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) also are telling. According to the CDC, the number of obese children ages 6 to 11 more than doubled in the past 20 years, while the rate for adolescents more than tripled.
- ▼ The American Diabetes Association (ADA) works tirelessly to promote awareness and action in the most affected communities with regard to reducing childhood obesity and the diabetes that can result. The ADA continually urges congress to make connections between Type II Diabetes and childhood obesity, and involve community members through petitions, public outreach, and partnering with schools in fitness programs. ¹

In addition to high blood pressure and high cholesterol, diabetes, depression and low self-esteem, Childhood Obesity puts children at risk for other serious health issues, too.

Other common complications include:

- ▼ Certain bone or hip conditions.
- ▼ Respiratory problems such as asthma and sleep apnea, which can be a serious problem for obese children, according to the NIH. Sleep apnea is a sleep disorder in which a person's breathing is interrupted many times during the night. Sleep apnea can cause learning and memory problems in children.
- ▼ Obese children, particularly girls, also are at risk for liver problems, hypertension, endocrine imbalance, gallbladder disease and stress-induced joint disease.

Once considered rare conditions in children, these diseases are seen with increasing frequency by pediatricians. But for each child who's seen by a pediatrician, far too many aren't:

- ▼ Families with limited access to health care, unfortunately, tend to delay seeking treatment for their children, who in turn have greater complications.
- ▼ Health care costs will increase as well.

The rise in what have historically been considered adult diseases is actually lowering the life expectancy overall for our next generation.

In certain cases, genetic diseases and hormonal disorders can predispose a child to obesity, but these are uncommon. These diseases, such as Prader-Willi syndrome and Cushing's syndrome, affect a very small proportion of children.

Although there are some genetic and hormonal causes of childhood obesity, most excess weight is caused by kids eating too much and exercising too little.

Children, unlike adults, need extra nutrients and calories to fuel their growth and development. So if they consume the calories needed for daily activities, growth and metabolism, they add pounds in proportion to their growth. But children who eat more calories than needed gain weight beyond what's required to support their growing bodies.



For Every Staggering Statistic...

a real child is in peril. Childhood obesity not only causes significant health problems: it also leads to death. One recent national headline-grabbing instance of a child dying from complications of obesity happened in St. Louis.

This young man, Anthony Troupe Jr., died in August 2009. A 13-year-old football player, he collapsed during football practice. The St. Louis County Medical Examiner determined that Anthony died as a direct result of hypertensive cardiovascular disease, a heart disease more commonly called high blood pressure.²



Young Anthony was 6-foot-2 and weighed 383 pounds.