



# NYC Vital Signs

## Obesity Begins Early: Findings Among Elementary School Children in New York City

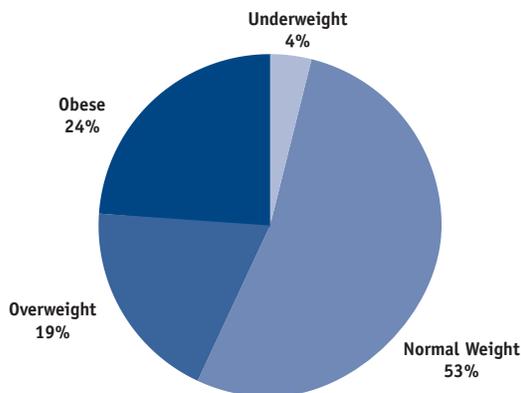
**O**besity among children is a pressing concern. Nationally, the percent of children ages 6–11 years old who are obese has nearly quadrupled, from less than 4% in the 1960s to more than 15% in 2000. There are serious long-term health consequences associated with being obese in childhood, including asthma, depression, diabetes, and heart disease.

In May 2003, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the Department of Education conducted a representative survey of elementary school children in the city public school

system. The survey, which measured the heights and weights of nearly 3,000 children, identified that almost half of New York City school children are not at healthy weights. This special report summarizes the survey findings and outlines important overweight and obesity prevention and management recommendations for families, schools, and providers.

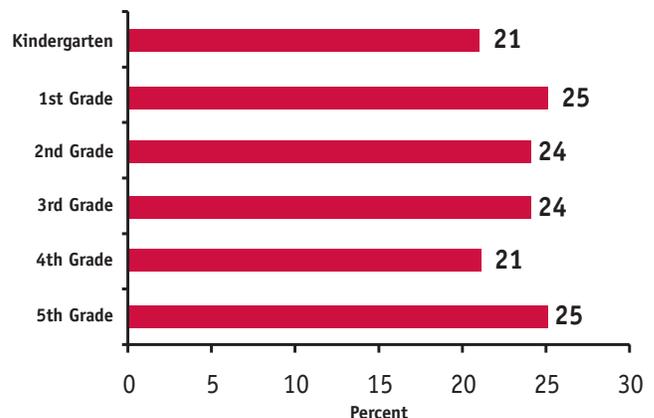
Obesity is calculated based on a child's weight, depending on height, age, and sex\*. To learn more about how to define obesity in children, visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/growthcharts/>.

### Only half (53%) of elementary school children are at a healthy weight



- Among children, 24% are obese, and an additional 19% are overweight. There is, however, also a small percent (4%) of children who are underweight.

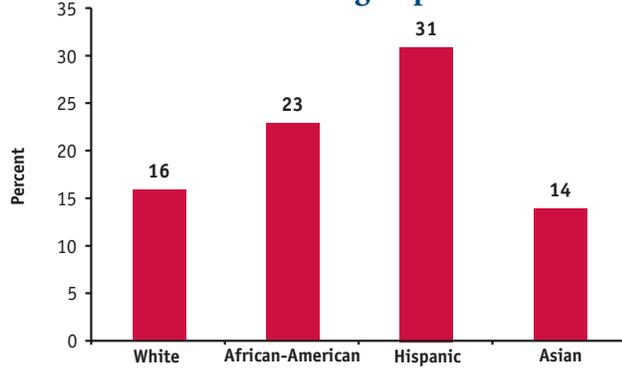
### Obesity is already common as early as kindergarten



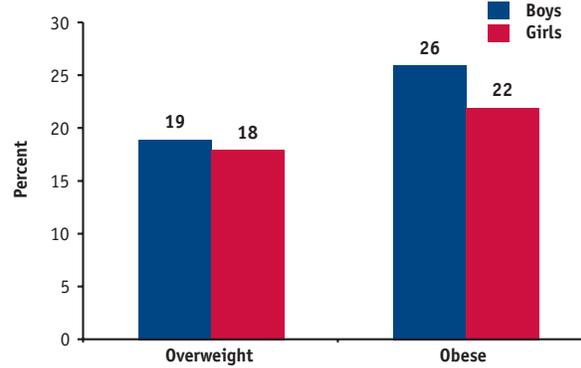
- In all 6 grades surveyed, more than 20% of children were obese. Obesity is already a serious problem by kindergarten (21%).

\* Obesity and overweight are defined by a child's body mass index (BMI).

### Obesity is a serious problem in children of all racial/ethnic groups



### Boys have slightly higher obesity levels than girls



#### Easy-to-Do Recommendations:

Overweight and obesity occur when a child eats more calories than he or she uses in daily activity and exercise. Here are some proven tips for parents and families to use when helping children reach a healthy weight:

##### Increase Activity—

1. Reduce television-viewing hours
2. Walk with your children when possible
3. Encourage active play-time

##### Decrease Calories—

4. Reduce non-diet soft-drink consumption
5. Eat less fast food and encourage more healthy meals at home
6. Have healthy snack foods available, such as apples, bananas, or carrots
7. Replace whole milk with low-fat (1%) or skim (fat-free) milk for children over 2 years old

A special report from the New York City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and Department of Education



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To contact NYC Vital Signs, e-mail [survey@health.nyc.gov](mailto:survey@health.nyc.gov).

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