

The Battle Against Childhood Obesity in Denver

Between the 2008-09 and 2013-14 school years, obesity among youth 12 to 17 years old increased from 20.9% to 21.2%.

Despite focused efforts, little progress has been made on decreasing childhood obesity in Denver. Among Hispanic children, obesity has increased at a faster rate compared to other races/ethnicities.

Though the percent of obese children in Denver is comparable to the national average, Denver has not been as successful in reducing these numbers, as cities like New York City.

This means that our collective efforts are not making measurable progress towards the goal of reducing childhood obesity.

Having identified childhood obesity as the most concerning current public health issue, policymakers, community organizations, health care systems, and public health agencies must increase their focus on this difficult and complex problem.

It is crucial to work together, and focus on effective approaches to decrease childhood obesity in Denver.

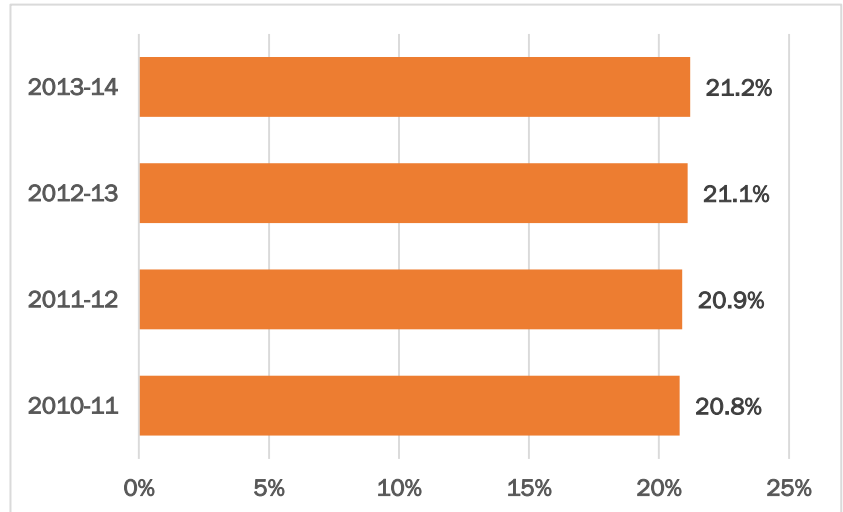
Progress is Within Reach

Denver can learn from other communities that have successfully reduced childhood obesity. Over the course of five years, New York City decreased childhood obesity from 21.9% to 20.7%, a reduction of 5.4%. At the same time, Denver's obesity rates remained largely consistent.

Though New York's absolute change of 1.2 percentage points may seem small, the consistent year-after-year decline shows that childhood obesity trends are moving in the right direction.

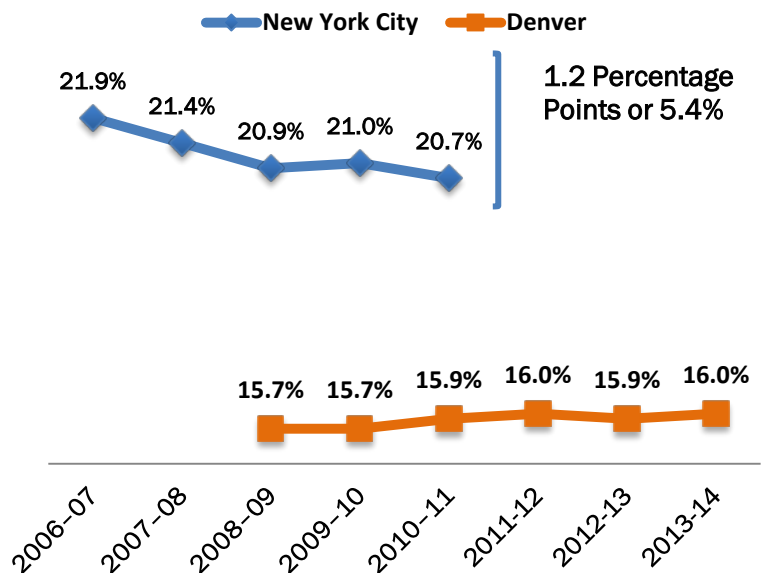
Collaborative cross-cutting partnerships helped New York make great strides in childhood obesity.

Percent of Denver 12-17 Year Olds Obese (by school year)



Source: Denver Public Schools

Trends in Childhood Obesity: Percent of Children Obese



Sources: *Obesity in K-8 Students: New York City, 2006-07 to 2010-11 School Years*. MMWR 2011. 60 (49): 1673-1678. Denver Public Schools Student Height and Weight Screening Data

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Studies show that obese children are more likely to become obese adults. As children grow into adulthood it is expected that, if obesity persists, every major system in the body will be affected, increasing the risks of developing type 2 diabetes, asthma, cancer and heart disease.

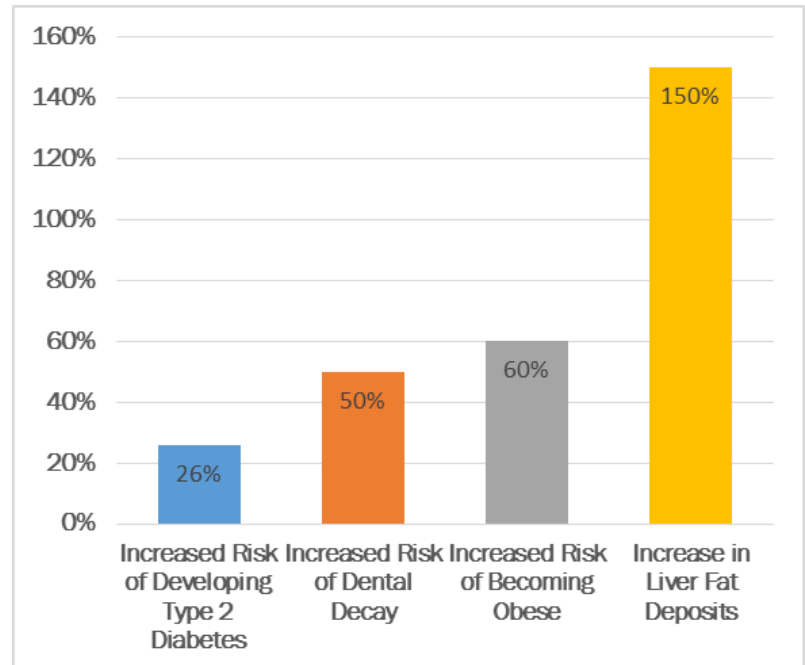
New York City achieved reductions in childhood obesity numbers by using a number of different interventions, including:

- Offering vouchers for vegetables and fruit.
- Promoting low fat milk and whole grain foods.
- Implementing nutrition and exercise standards in child daycare centers.
- Offering healthier food in schools.
- Ensuring increased availability of places for exercise.

However, the single most important factor in achieving these reductions was public education. Sugar-sweetened beverage consumption is most closely associated with the obesity epidemic, and can also be linked to an increased risk for diabetes, tooth decay and fatty liver disease.

Public education, specific to the dangers of sugar-sweetened beverage consumption, is key for Denver to successfully decrease childhood obesity rates.

Health Risks of Regularly Consuming Sugary Beverages



Source: [Center for Science in the Public Interest](#), February 2015
*Based on servings of one to two cans of sugary beverages a day.

What can you do?

- Adopt components of sugar sweetened beverage public education campaigns, like [Rethink Your Drink](#), for your organization.
- Encourage policymakers, funders, and community organizations to increase efforts to limit unhealthy options, including sugary beverages, to children in public venues.
- Serve water during, and in between meals and at children's sports practices and games.
- Follow the **5-2-1-0** rule each day:
 - 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables.
 - 2 hours or less of screen time.
 - 1 hour or more of physical activity.
 - 0 sugar sweetened beverages.

What are we doing?

- [Denver Health](#) offers a **Healthy Lifestyle Clinic**, with a multidisciplinary team of providers, dietitians and health coaches, providing weight counseling services to patients and their families.
- [Denver Public Health](#) is piloting [Rethink Your Drink](#) messages in clinic rooms, patient waiting areas, WIC clinics and City of Denver Healthy Corner stores.
- Denver Public Health is also working with seven Metro Denver counties to develop a grassroots public education campaign focused on the benefits of drinking water, and the dangers of consuming sugary beverages.