Childhood Obesity Still Highest Among Minorities

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Although studies show childhood obesity ratesleveling off, for certain ethnic groups they have climbed, according toa study published in the journal *Pediatrics* and reported by HealthDay News.

Thebad news for black, Hispanic and American Indian girls is that they aretwo to three times more likely to have a higher body mass index (BMI)than white girls. (In fact, obesity rates for white girls decreasedfrom a high in 2005.)

For the study, researchers from theUniversity of California at San Francisco reviewed data on more than 8million fifth, seventh and ninth graders who underwent school-based BMIscreenings between 2001 and 2008 in that state.

Of thechildren studied, 46 percent were Latino, 33 percent white, almost 13percent Asian, 8 percent black and less than 1 percent American Indian.

The data were separated into several BMI categories: overweight, obese and severely obese.

Scientistsfound that 38 percent of the kids were overweight, almost 20 percentwere obese and 3.6 percent tipped the scales as being severely obese.

Ingeneral, researchers found that while rates of obesity for white girlspeaked in 2005 then declined, the prevalence of obesity continued toincrease for black and American Indian girls. Rates for Hispanic girlspeaked in 2005 then leveled off, and Asian girls showed no obesityincrease.

In addition, scientists found a huge racial disparityin the highest BMI group, with 4.6 percent of black girls and 4.9percent of American Indian girls falling into this category comparedwith only 1.3 percent of white girls.

Overall, for their age,boys had a higher BMI index than girls. But obesity rates for white,Hispanic and Asian boys dropped within the study period, and onlyseverely obese black boys showed an increased prevalence of obesity.

“Whatwas encouraging was that we saw some decline in obesity, [but] we sawan increase in the racial disparities,” said Kristine Madsen, MD, leadauthor of the study and an assistant professor of

pediatrics at theUniversity of California at San Francisco.

What this means isthat racial health disparities are key in meeting the specificchallenges facing different races and cultures, said Carolyn Landis,PhD, a psychologist and associate professor of pediatrics at RainbowBabies and Children’s Hospital in Cleveland.

It’s important tospread the message of better health and to tailor these campaigns fordiverse communities, Landis added. For example, in areas where it’sunsafe for children to play outside, campaigns should include ideas forindoor activities (like dancing inside the house).

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