

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 5, 2024

**Harris County Public Health Observes
National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month**

Choosing healthier foods and more physical activity can reduce childhood obesity in Harris County.

Houston – September is National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month, and Harris County Public Health (HCPH) is celebrating by reminding families to practice healthier eating habits and maintain physical activity to avoid future health risks in children.

A child is affected by obesity if their [body mass index \(BMI\)](#), a measurement comparing a child or teen’s weight to that of peers their age, is at or greater than 95 percent. Unfortunately, there is a rising trend of children being diagnosed with diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, stroke, and other conditions associated with obesity that affect a child's self-esteem, mental health, and social development.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), childhood obesity is a significant public health concern, with about 1 in 5 children and adolescents being affected. Overall US national data shows that Hispanic and non-Hispanic Black children and children in families with lower incomes are more at risk of childhood obesity. The data shows the rates as follows:

- Hispanic children (26.2%)
- non-Hispanic Black children (24.8%)
- non-Hispanic white (16.6%)
- non-Hispanic Asian (9.0%) children
- Among U.S. girls, obesity prevalence was highest among non-Hispanic Black girls (30.8%).
- Among U.S. boys, obesity prevalence was highest among Hispanic boys (29.3%).

"Childhood obesity is a serious health problem that can have lifelong consequences," said Ericka Brown, MD, HCPH Local Health Authority for Harris County Public Health. "Especially for children living in food deserts where access to healthy options is limited. Even in areas with fewer options, small changes—such as choosing fresh produce when available, incorporating whole grains, and reducing sugary drinks—can make a big difference. Our Food and Nutrition program at Harris County Public Health is striving to address food insecurity in key areas of the County by partnering with existing organizations whose mission focuses on connecting vulnerable families and individuals with nutritious foods; increasing the capacity and reach of these programs can have an impact on the health of our communities."

-more-

HCPH is the local public health agency for the Harris County, Texas jurisdiction. It provides a wide variety of public health activities and services aimed at improving the health and well-being of the Harris County community.

Follow HCPH on Twitter [@hcptx](#) and like us on [Facebook](#)

HCPH recommends several tips for community members of Harris County to help reduce childhood obesity:

Be active. Children should get at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week. Activities like running, jumping, dancing, and riding a bike can have health benefits like strengthening bones and muscles while reducing the chance of chronic disease.

- **Eat healthy.** Eat a healthy diet low in added sugar, salt, and saturated fat, and include more nutritious foods such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Offer your child healthy snacks instead of candies or chips. Limit the number of sugary drinks to your child.
- **Limit screen time.** Limit television watching, playing video games, smartphone/tablet use, and consider removing mobile devices from bedrooms at night. Discourage snacking while watching TV and encourage more outdoor physical activity.
- **Focus on health, not weight.** Teach and model positive attitudes toward food and physical activity, without emphasizing body weight. Don't use food as a reward or withhold food as a punishment.
- **Get enough sleep.** Lack of sleep is associated with obesity, partly because inadequate sleep may make us eat more and be less physically active. Children and teens need more sleep than adults, and the amount varies by age.

In addition, HCPH offers the following programs to help community members overcome obesity:

The Nutrition and Physical Activity (NPA) Program

The NPA program empowers and educates community members on ways to eat healthier and increase physical activity to help maintain a healthy weight. The NPA program provides a variety of fun, evidence-based sessions to teach every age group. Local schools and organizations can inquire about these sessions and schedule one at their location by emailing nutritionPHS@phs.hctx.net or calling (713) 274-5711.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program

The WIC program provides nutrition support and education for pregnant and breastfeeding women and families with children younger than 5. Visit the [HCPH website](#) for more information.

###