

## HEALTH

## Childhood Obesity is a Growing Threat to America's Children

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ATLANTA—Researchers, physicians and policymakers are increasingly recognizing the physical and mental health threats stemming from the wave of childhood obesity sweeping across the country. It is equally important that the search for solutions focuses on the root causes—the school, economic and community conditions that are incubators for this epidemic.

Clearly, the latest data indicate that the United States faces an obesity crisis, particularly among children. According to a report by the Trust for America's Health (TAH) and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, obesity rates increased in 28 states over the past year, with 38—more than two-thirds of the states—having adult rates above 25 percent.

Further, the increases among children have raised considerable concern, since researchers now believe that obesity impacts learning, mental health and social behavior. In 2003,

the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) found that only three states and the District of Columbia had childhood obesity rates higher than 20 percent—Kentucky, Tennessee and West Virginia. Yet, four years later the NSCH's survey found that obesity had reached that level in eight jurisdictions—the District of Columbia and the states of Arkansas, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas.

At a congressional hearing earlier this year, Rep. Frank Pallone Jr. (D-NJ) put the problem in perspective: "In my state, New Jersey, 31 percent of our children are clinically overweight. That's nearly 7 percent higher than the rate of adult obesity. And I'm worried that, at a time of economic recession and high unemployment rates, many of these children will be less likely to have access to healthier, more expensive foods. Meanwhile, safety-net health programs are continuously overextended as the numbers of uninsured and underinsured continue to grow, posing further risk to children who may not be receiving

the medical care that they need."

Moreover, the obesity rates are highest among minority populations. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Hispanic boys and African American girls have the highest rates of obesity, with 22.1 percent of Hispanic boys and 27.7 percent of African American girls classified as obese. In fact, data show that obesity rates for African Americans and Latinos are higher than for Whites in at least 40 states and the District of Columbia.

There is also a clear link between obesity and income levels—35 percent of adults earning less than \$15,000 per year are obese, compared to 24 percent of adults earning \$50,000 or

more per year. It's no coincidence that the South, which is the poorest region of the country, is home to 10 of the 11 states with the highest rates of obesity. For the sixth straight year, Mississippi has the highest rate for adults, 33.8 percent.

The data are startling because researchers have found links between obesity and higher rates of serious diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure—even among children.

So what are the factors contributing to the high levels of obesity?

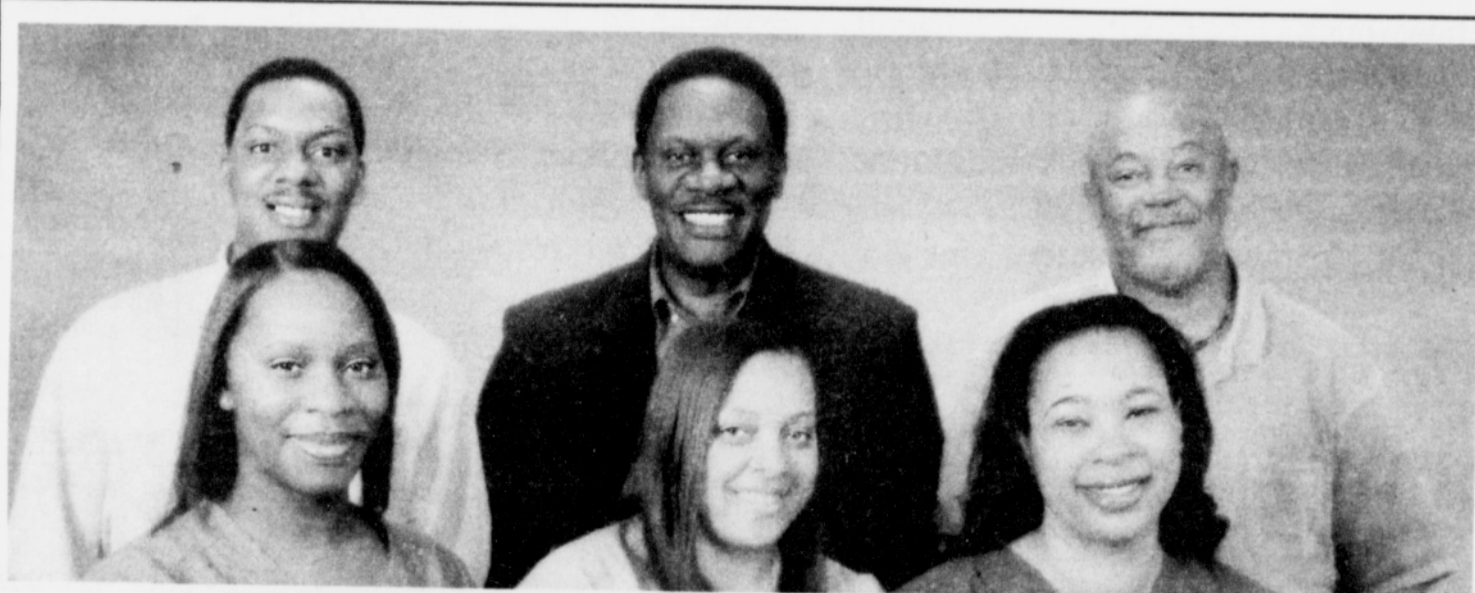
Researchers have determined that residents of minority communities have fewer opportunities to purchase healthy foods, such as fresh veg-

through education programs in the schools, where children and adolescents spend the majority of their day, as well as by changing the foods and beverages available to children while they are in school. Congress can take a stand in legislation reauthorizing the child nutrition programs that expire this fall. Supporters are calling for the establishment of nutrition standards for all food sold at schools, meals served in cafeterias and snacks offered in vending machines.

There has also been tremendous growth in farm-to-school programs that bring fresh fruits and vegetables into the schools. "Studies show that farm-to-school programs increase fruit and vegetable consumption among students at participating schools," the TAH report said, adding that a study conducted by the University of California at Davis found that farm-to-school programs not only increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables among participating students, but also change eating habits, causing students to choose more healthy options when fresh produce is available at lunch.

Dr. Henrie M. Treadwell is director of Community Voices, a non-profit organization at Morehouse School of Medicine working to improve health services and health-care access for all Americans. Delores Bolden Stamps is President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of DB Stamps and Associates, an educational and resources development/management consultancy. Mary Currie is Southern Area Director of The Links, Incorporated and has focused on preventing childhood obesity. For media interviews with Dr. Treadwell, please contact Melva B. Robertson at 404-752-8649 or mrobertson@msm.edu.

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Dr. Billy R. Flowers (above center) and his skilled staff are ready to help those in need.

## THE SPINA COLUMN™

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### Part 26 KIDS AND CHIROPRACTIC

#### As the twig is bent so grows the tree

**Q:** I have recently noticed my son has one shoulder higher than the other. Could this be a sign of a problem in his spine?

**A:** Good thinking, mom! It surely could. In fact having one shoulder higher than the other is a cardinal sign of curvature of the spine. According to Chiropractic research, the earlier a curvature is caught, the higher the potential for success. To be certain about health of your child, call our office today for a professional spinal evaluation. Spines (big or small) are our specialty.

**Q:** I have been told that my child needs an operation for a curvature in her spine. Is there an alternative?

**A:** You most definitely should have a thorough Chiropractic checkup on your child immediately. Spinal surgery gets. All conservative efforts at handling your child's problem should be considered before consenting to sur-

gery. Our office is highly trained and skilled at handling problems like that of your child's. Don't be fooled by the thought of "watching the condition" either. Without proper assistance it won't go away. Offer your children the best in health care. Give them regular Chiropractic checkups. As the twig is bent so grows the tree!

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etables, because there are far fewer supermarkets in their neighborhoods. By contrast, there is a higher concentration of fast-food outlets, which serve less healthy food. Other factors include a propensity to eat foods cooked with more grease and containing more fat.

Of particular concern for children is that sugar-sweetened beverages account for 10 percent to 15 percent of the daily calorie intake for children and adolescents, a percentage that has been steadily increasing over the past few decades, according to The New England Journal of Medicine.

The most effective way to combat childhood obesity may be

## Blood Supply Shortage

In an effort to prevent the decline in blood supply from declining further, the American Red Cross Blood Services is calling out to the community to donate their blood in the upcoming summer months.

According to the American Red Cross Blood Services, the supply of Type O negative blood, which is always in high demand because it can be transfused to patients of any blood type, has dropped to critically low levels.

"The American Red Cross is offering convenient blood drive hours and reaching out to eligible blood donors, sponsors and community leaders to ask them to help recruit type O negative blood donations to help meet the needs of patients in

our community," said Daphne Mathew, spokesperson for the American Red Cross Pacific Northwest Blood Services Region.

A shortage of type O negative blood, which is used the most in emergency situations, often occurs during the summer months because fewer residents donate due to holiday vacations and schools hosting fewer drives, they explained. The Red Cross Pacific Northwest Blood Services Region provides lifesaving blood to more than 80 hospitals, which requires nearly 1,000 people to give blood and platelets each weekday.

Blood donors are asked to call 1-800-REDCROSS or visit redcrossblood.org.