

Addressing Obesity in Schools

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted students' routines and access to the school environment. Children gained weight at a faster rate during the pandemic (June 1-November 2020) compared to pre-pandemic, with younger school-aged children (6-11) experiencing a rate of BMI change that was 2.5 higher than before the pandemic. 15

Schools are a priority setting for obesity prevention efforts because they reach the vast majority of school-aged youth, provide regularly scheduled opportunities for physical activity, and offer nutritious foods through school meal programs. 3

With a widespread return to in person learning, children can have consistent access to physical activity opportunities, healthy meals, and services provided by school nurses and counselors.

A comprehensive approach is effective at addressing childhood obesity in schools, especially for elementary and middle school students.¹³⁻¹⁵ Scientists know less about what school-based obesity prevention approaches are effective for teenagers.¹³⁻¹⁵ A comprehensive approach means directing attention to nutrition and physical activity in schools and even involving school nurses, parents, caregivers, and other community members (e.g., pediatricians, after-school program providers) in the process. This approach aims to support the health and well-being of all students. It does not single out students according to their weight status or body size. Overweight and obesity are sensitive issues for students and families and must be addressed with compassion, understanding, and care.¹⁶ School-based programs to promote physical activity and improved diet quality do not appear to contribute to increases in depression, anxiety, or body-dissatisfaction; however, many studies do not collect information about these unintended effects.¹⁵ To avoid embarrassing or shaming students, schools should not emphasize physical appearances or reinforce negative stereotypes about obesity.¹⁷

Reference

[Introduction to Kinesiology: Studying Physical Activity](#)

[Medical Ethics for the Boards, Third Edition](#)