



California Asthma Quick Facts

Supplement to California Asthma Facts, Asthma and Obesity:
Results from the California Healthy Kids Survey, 2001-2003

California Department of Health Services

May 2006

The full report can be found at: http://californiabreathing.org/files/california_asthma_facts_obesity.pdf

Asthma and Obesity

Both childhood asthma and childhood obesity are on the rise in California and throughout the United States. For years, a relationship between asthma and obesity has been evident, but it is not clear if one condition causes the other. We do know that these are two important issues affecting the health of children and adults in California. The relationship between asthma and obesity is one that researchers are trying to learn more about.

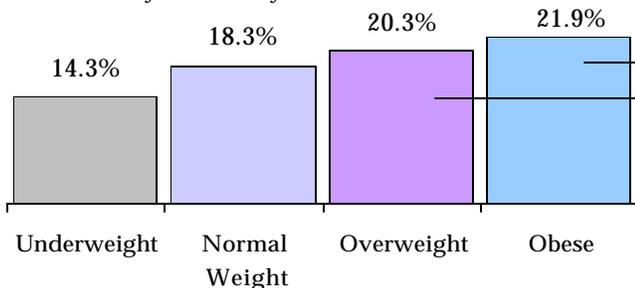
The California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) is a tool that allows California Breathing, a program of the California Department of Health Services, to further explore the connection between asthma and obesity. The findings presented here are from the 2001-2003 CHKS, which is given to seventh, ninth and eleventh grade students throughout the state. The survey asks students to report on numerous health factors and behaviors which are used to determine their weight category and whether or not they have asthma (if they have ever been diagnosed with asthma in their life). To learn more about how we calculate student weight categories and asthma percentages (also called prevalence), see the full report at: http://californiabreathing.org/files/california_asthma_facts_obesity.pdf.

What the Data Tell Us

- Nearly 20 percent of students surveyed were overweight or obese, while 78 percent were considered normal weight.
- Overall, 18.7 percent of students reported that they had been diagnosed with asthma at some point in their lives. We refer to this as “percentage with asthma “ or “lifetime asthma prevalence.”
- Students who were overweight and obese had the highest percentage of asthma, 20.3 percent and 21.9 percent respectively (Figure 1). The same trend existed among both male and female students.
- Both weight category and asthma percentages vary by race/ethnicity. For example, among students that were identified as obese, one-third (33 percent) of Black students had asthma compared to only 17 percent of Hispanic students.

Figure 1. Percentage of Adolescents with Asthma by Weight

California Healthy Kids Survey, 2001-2003



Students who were overweight or obese had the highest percentage of lifetime asthma.

The percentage of students with asthma was 18.7 percent. Almost 22 percent of students who were obese had asthma.



Arnold Schwarzenegger
Governor
State of California

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Secretary
California Health and Human Services Agency

Sandra Shewry
Director
California Department of Health Services



What can be done?

Although the link between obesity and asthma is not completely understood, enough evidence suggests that maintaining or reaching a healthy weight is an important strategy for reducing the burden of a number of chronic conditions, including asthma, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes.

Good nutrition and regular physical activity are important for achieving a healthy weight. All children and adolescents should have access to healthy food choices and opportunities for physical activity every day. As parents, school personnel, health care providers, city-planners, policy makers, and community members, we all play a role in helping kids achieve healthy weights.

Because we have seen higher prevalence of asthma in adolescents who are overweight or obese, nutrition and physical activity programs need to include strategies for encouraging kids with asthma to participate.

Resources

National Heart Lung, Blood Institute:

Asthma and Physical Activity in the School

http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/lung/asthma/phy_asth.htm

This easy-to-read booklet is a perfect companion for teachers and coaches who want to help students with asthma participate in sports and physical activities. It covers the causes of asthma, symptoms of an asthma attack, how to avoid and control asthma triggers, how to help students who take medications, and how to modify activities to match children's current asthma status.

Starlight Starbright Children's Foundation's Asthma Tool Kit for Schools

This tool kit contains everything you need to know about helping students manage asthma. The tool kit contains materials for all types of school personnel and parents. This Tool Kit is available to all California schools free of charge. To order your tool kit, call 310.479.1212 x 23.

For more information about asthma in California, or to view *The Strategic Plan for Asthma in California*, visit: www.californiabreathing.org

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Tips for parents, school personnel, and coaches when planning physical activity for kids with asthma.

- Make sure all students with asthma have an asthma action plan indicating their triggers and instructions to follow if asthma symptoms begin while exercising. Keep asthma medicines nearby (on the field, etc.).
- Some people with asthma have exercise induced asthma, which means exercise causes asthma symptoms to start or worsen. Taking medicine before exercise can often prevent these symptoms.
- Check the Air Quality Index in your community. On poor air quality days, people with asthma may be sensitive to outdoor pollutants. If air quality is poor, plan indoor activities or go outdoors when air quality is best, which varies by season.
- Plan warm-up activities; students with asthma need to warm up slowly before rigorous exercise.



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