

Childhood obesity study reveals increases and disparities in central Indiana

Indianapolis, IN -- For the first time, researchers at the IU Richard M. Fairbanks School of Public Health have identified childhood obesity rates and trends in central Indiana.

Examining data from January 1, 2014, through December 31, 2022, the researchers found that childhood obesity had increased nearly 36% from 2014, affecting one in five children between the ages of two to 19.

Of the total 36% increase in childhood obesity, more than half of the increase occurred during the pandemic years 2020 to 2022.

“This is a huge win for public health,” said Thomas Duszynski, assistant professor of epidemiology and the Master of Public Health program director at the Fairbanks School. “We can’t begin to work on prevention and treatment until we understand the prevalence of an issue. And now, central Indiana has almost a decade of data that will create a baseline for healthcare providers and children’s health partners to track and identify obesity rates.”

Funded by [Jump IN for Healthy Kids](#), the report utilized data from the state’s Health Information Exchange, which contains electronic health record data contributed by Community Health Network, Ascension St. Vincent, Eskenazi Health, IU Health and other health providers and data sources in central Indiana. Jump IN has secured funding to continue collecting and analyzing data to update this report through 2026.

“Jump IN has long sought funding to collect comprehensive height and weight data to develop accurate overweight and obesity prevalence rates,” said Julie Burns, chief executive officer of Jump IN. “We can now strengthen prevention and intervention and more effectively address health inequities. Further research may shed more light on both the decreases and increases we see in these data. We hope rates continue to decline to pre-pandemic levels as our community returns to the multi-sector, systems-level, collaborative strategies that research demonstrates improve child health and population obesity.”

In 2022, one in five children in Indiana were obese. Marion County has the highest rates of female and male childhood obesity.

Other data from the report indicates that from 2014 to 2022, childhood obesity rates increased:

- 32% for females.
- 39% for males.
- 69% for Hispanics and 66% for Asians.
- 96% for two- to five-year-olds, 40% for six- to 11-year-olds and 26% for 12- to 19-year-olds.

“There is not one single factor that contributes to childhood obesity,” said Duszynski. “Too many Hoosiers face significant barriers to health. This report lays the groundwork for future action to

address the barriers that prevent our neighbors from being healthy and help kids and families in central Indiana achieve better health.”