CHILDHOOD OBESITY IN CALIFORNIA

A study by the
California Center for
Public Health Advocacy

Prepared by
News & Information Bureau
The California Endowment
August 2005
San Francisco Chronicle
Fatter Than Ever / Despite alarms over childhood obesity, California’s kids are packing on pounds
August 25, 2005

Daily News
Area Kids Grow Fatter / Bulge winning battle since ’01
August 25, 2005

The Oakland Tribune
More Kids Overweight in Bay Area, California / Study reports rise of 6.2 percent in the region over the last three years
August 25, 2005

The Argus
Oh, Torrico: Your Area’s Kids Put on Pounds / Nonpartisan group hopes to grab lawmakers’ attention by reporting health data by district
August 25, 2005

Ventura County Star
EDITORIAL: Don’t Go Soft on Drink Ban; Extend soda law to high schools
August 25, 2005

The San Bernardino County Sun
Study: Area Kids’ Weight Growing Issue
August 25, 2005

Pasadena Star-News
School Kids Getting Heavier, Study Shows
August 25, 2005

The San Luis Obispo Tribune
More County Children Are Overweight / But the increase is smaller here than the state average, study shows
August 25, 2005

San Gabriel Valley Tribune
Childhood Obesity Continues to Rise / Study finds Valley percentages outpace state
August 25, 2005
Whittier Daily News
Study Finds Alarming Rise in Childhood Obesity
*August 25, 2005*

Contra Costa Times
Efforts to Halt Obesity Failing State Children
*August 25, 2005*
The message doesn't seem to be clicking with California schoolkids.

Despite all the studies and media coverage of the so-called obesity epidemic, youngsters are as fat as ever and getting fatter, according to a report issued Wednesday by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy, a nonprofit group in Davis. And that, says the group, is setting up a big public health crisis if something isn't done.

Fitness-test scores in the public schools showed that about 28 of every 100 schoolchildren in California were overweight in 2004, up 6 percent from 2001, when a similar study was done.

"Quite frankly, we were shocked," said Harold Goldstein, the group's executive director. "Given all the attention childhood obesity has gotten, we did not expect to see this kind of increase."

The state's childhood weight profile seems to be bulging in all directions, researchers said, pointing to worsening trend lines for girls and boys of all ages and all racial and ethnic backgrounds. Although childhood obesity rates looked markedly worse in Los Angeles than in the Bay Area, no region of the state has been spared.

"It's increasing everywhere, across the board," Goldstein said. "This epidemic is not going to go away on its own. It's a personal and medical disaster, and not enough is being done."

The results were broken down by state Assembly district in hopes that policymakers would take heed and push harder for healthier snacks, bottled water and real fruit juice in schools. Bills are pending in the Legislature that would extend partial bans on junk food and soda already in place.

The new numbers are "pretty sobering," said state Sen. Deborah Ortiz, D- Sacramento, chair of the Senate Health Committee and an advocate of vending machine restrictions and more consumer nutrition information in restaurants. "When you think of the projections for our health care costs, it's pretty frightening."

The San Francisco Unified School District was one of the first in the country to move against junk food on school grounds and claims one of the strictest policies in the nation promoting healthy foods and beverages.

Parents who backed the policy call it an important first step, suggesting that health messages taught in the classrooms are undermined when kids step into hallways lined with vending machines full of sugary drinks and pastries.

Still, even the staunchest advocates of healthy food choices in the schools concede that removing junk food from school campuses is not enough to make a big dent in the problem.
As if to underscore that point, the new study shows the percentage of overweight children jumped 9.6 percent in Assembly District 12, which includes the western half of San Francisco, and a whopping 14.3 percent in District 13, which covers downtown and most of the waterfront.

"People have bad habits everywhere," said Dana Woldow, parent of two children in the San Francisco schools who leads a district nutrition committee. "This problem took 20 or 30 years to develop, and it's probably going to take 20 or 30 years to fix."

Whatever the root cause, researchers said, the latest numbers document a growing threat to public health, noting that 75 percent of children who are overweight are expected to be overweight as adults. That translates into more cases of diabetes, asthma and other chronic diseases.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has scheduled a summit on Sept. 15 in Sacramento at which experts plan to address the issue of childhood health and nutrition. He also supports a pair of school-nutrition bills, SB12 and SB965, sponsored by state Sen. Martha Escutia, D-Whittier (Los Angeles County).

Despite the latest findings, experts said, California remains a pacesetter in the national battle against childhood obesity. Gail Woodward-Lopez, associate director of the UC Berkeley Center for Weight and Health, said the report underscores the difficulty of changing a culture in some ways geared to passive entertainment and empty calories.

"Although we've started to raise awareness and concern, we need to move into more concrete efforts to reverse those trends," she said.

But there isn't universal agreement on just what needs to be done. Despite the bipartisan support for the Escutia measures, some advocates maintain it's wrong to focus too much attention on junk food and soda in school vending machines.

Dan Mindus, senior analyst with a Washington, D.C., group called the Center for Consumer Freedom, argued that the real problem isn't about food choices, but how little exercise kids get.

"Restricting vending machine options takes our eye off the ball," he said, arguing that kids' caloric intake hasn't increased so much as activity levels have declined. "What we need to do is get kids exercising in gym class, running around with their friends after school and having more time at recess."

His group, which receives some of its financial support from food and beverage companies, maintains that high school students in particular should be mature enough to decide on their own what to eat and drink.

That argument has been used in the past to derail tough rules on school vending machines. The latest studies don't guarantee such arguments will be overcome this year, Ortiz said.

The latest findings were based on results of the California Physical Fitness Test, which state educators give to all public-school students in the fifth, seventh and ninth grades. Results for about 1.4 million students at 7,624 schools were included in the analysis.

The fitness test includes a measure of body composition based on a common measure of weight relative to height called the body mass index, or BMI. All students whose weight pushed them above a "healthy fitness zone" were classified as overweight.

Results across the state show considerable regional variation, but most of those differences were attributed to demographics.
The latest study showed Pacific Islanders had the highest percentage of children overweight, at 35.9 percent, followed by Latinos at 35.4 percent, American Indians/Alaskan Natives at 31.7 percent and African Americans at 28.7 percent. Only 17.9 percent of Asians and 20.6 percent of white children were in the overweight category.

Even in regions of the state with relatively few childhood weight problems, however, policymakers said more needs to be done to keep kids healthy.

In the Marin-Sonoma counties district of state Assemblyman Joe Nation, for instance, only 20.5 percent of all schoolchildren were overweight last year, one of the lowest percentages in the state. Still, that was up from 17.5 percent just three years earlier.

"I think the Legislature and the governor, in particular, are beginning to pay much more attention to this," Nation, a Democrat, said Wednesday. "We need to ensure there are healthy alternatives in terms of what people can eat and drink in schools today."

---

**Childhood obesity in California**

Percentage of children who were overweight in grades 5, 7 and 9 in California:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All children</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BY GENDER</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BY GRADE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BY RACE/ETHNICITY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How to calculate your child’s body mass index (BMI)**

1. Determine your child’s weight in pounds and height in inches. **EXAMPLE:**
   - 70 pounds
   - 54 inches tall

2. Divide your child’s weight by height. **EXAMPLE:**
   - $70 \div 54 = 1.296$

3. Divide the result by the child’s height again. **EXAMPLE:**
   - $1.296 \div 54 = 0.024$

4. Multiply by 703. This is the child’s Body Mass Index. **EXAMPLE:**
   - $0.024 \times 703 = 16.88$

The following Web sites can help you determine your BMI:
- [www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/calc-bmi.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/calc-bmi.htm)
- [www.halls.md/body-mass-index/av.htm](http://www.halls.md/body-mass-index/av.htm)

**Healthy fitness zone (HFZ) standards for body composition**

Number on left is lower limit of HFZ; number on right is upper limit of HFZ.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>GIRLS</th>
<th>BOYS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.6-23.5</td>
<td>15.3-21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>16.9-24.0</td>
<td>15.8-21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>16.9-24.5</td>
<td>16.0-22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>17.5-24.5</td>
<td>16.6-23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>17.5-25.0</td>
<td>17.5-24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>17.5-25.0</td>
<td>18.1-25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>17.5-25.0</td>
<td>18.5-26.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: California Center for Public Health Advocacy, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The Chronicle
Childhood obesity by state Assembly district

Maps are keyed by California Assembly district to the percentage of children who were overweight in grades 5, 7 and 9 in 2004:

- 18.2 to 23.2%
- 23.3 to 26.6%
- 26.7 to 28.3%
- 28.4 to 32.6%
- 32.7 to 39.1%

BAY AREA

LOS ANGELES AREA

Source: California Center for Public Health Advocacy
Area kids grow fatter
Bulge winning battle since '01

By Lisa M. Sodders, Staff Writer

August 25, 2005

Despite efforts to promote fitness and healthier foods, the number of obese children in the San Fernando Valley and statewide soared over the past three years, alarming experts who predict a health crisis if drastic measures are not taken, a report released today says.

Updating an earlier study based on 2001 figures, the California Center for Public Health Advocacy found that childhood obesity rose 6.2 percent statewide and as much as 15 percent in the Valley area.

"We were shocked by the findings," said Harold Goldstein, the center's executive director. "Given the amount of media attention this epidemic has gotten, we didn't expect an increase of 6 percent in just three years. This is a personal and medical disaster."

The study broke down the percentages by Assembly district and found there was an increase in the number of overweight children in nearly 90 percent of the districts.

The results show that efforts by many individuals and some school systems, including a ban on selling junk food and soda on Los Angeles Unified campuses, aren't enough, Goldstein said.

He said parents need to enlist their city, county and state officials to change their community's environment and counteract a pervasive marketing juggernaut that bombards children every day with images of junk food and sugar-filled drinks.

What is needed, he said, is a campaign similar to the massive national anti-smoking effort in the 1970s and 1980s, which many credit for a sharp decline in smoking among adults.

"The solution needs to be much more comprehensive than the schools," Goldstein said.

"We're really at the beginning of the movement. We need to establish statewide policies that support parents in teaching their children to make the right choices, rather than continuing to allow the financial interests of soda and fast-food companies to win out over the health of our children."

Among the Assembly districts that encompass eastern Ventura and northern Los Angeles counties, Assemblyman Lloyd Levine's 40th District had the biggest increase over a three-year period: 15.3 percent, with 31.9 percent of the children obese, compared with 27.7 percent in 2001.
Levine, who launched the Kids' Fitness Challenge races in 2004 and is an avid marathon runner, said he believes many of the fitness initiatives are too new to have yet made a dent in the obesity rates.

"It takes a while to change things, especially ingrained habits," said Levine, D-Van Nuys. "We just need to keep fighting - and fighting harder - to show people how to be fit and healthy."

Assemblywoman Cindy Montaez's 39th District posted a 6.1 percent increase, but it had the highest percentage of overweight kids of the nine Valley districts, with 37.8 percent.

"In our district, there's a direct correlation between high poverty and high obesity," said Montaez, D-Mission Hills, whose district includes some of the poorest portions of the eastern San Fernando Valley.

Her district also has the second-smallest acreage of parkland available per resident, Montaez said. One of the legislative changes she would like to see is more funding for parkland for districts with high obesity rates.

The president of the Los Angeles Unified School District board, Marlene Canter, called the ban on soda and junk-food sales a "giant baby step," but noted that it is less than a year old.

The district is launching farmers markets at eight campuses, with the goal of eventually expanding them to all its high schools, to give students access to fresh fruits and vegetables. The LAUSD has also allocated $50 million of a proposed $4 billion bond measure for joint-use projects with the city, such as keeping schools open after hours and on weekends for community use.

The 41st District represented by Assemblywoman Fran Pavley, D-Woodland Hills, posted a 4.4 decline in childhood obesity, the only Valley-based district with a drop. Roughly 24 percent of children rated overweight, compared with 25.1 percent three years ago, in the more affluent region that includes coastal Los Angeles and Ventura counties.

Statewide, Assembly Speaker Fabian Nuez's 46th District, which incorporates downtown Los Angeles, central Los Angeles, Little Tokyo, Boyle Heights and a portion of East Los Angeles, had the highest percentage of overweight children: 39.1 percent, a 6.4 percent increase from three years earlier.

The study's findings are significant because childhood obesity has been linked to at least 10 chronic diseases. Seventy-five percent of obese adolescents become obese adults.

If the trends continue, California Center for Public Health Advocacy analysts estimate that, of children born in 2000, about one-third of the boys and 39 percent of the girls will go on to develop Type II diabetes, once referred to as "adult onset" but increasingly seen in children.

Center analysts say obesity in California costs the state an estimated $28 billion in direct medical expenses and lost productivity. And Montaez noted another ominous trend: Hospitals across the Southland have been closing, dramatically reducing access to medical care.

The center report comes on the heels of one released earlier this week by the Trust for America's Health. That study found that obesity rates are rising nationwide and that government policies are insufficient and too narrowly focused to stop the trend.
The California study examined data from the state's 2004 physical-fitness test given to students in the fifth, seventh and ninth grades through the California Department of Education. The study focused on one of the measures, the Body Mass Index or BMI. For example, in the BMI calculation, a 10-year-old boy who is 4 feet 8 inches tall is considered overweight if he weighs 94 pounds.

The study found the rate of overweight children grew from 26.5 of every 100 students in 2001 to 28.1 of every 100 in 2004.

The researchers also found that the prevalence of overweight children increased for every ethnicity and age studied, as well as for both genders, although boys were more likely to be overweight than girls, and Pacific Islanders and Latinos had higher rates of obesity than non-Latino whites and Asians.

The study recommends that health foods be made available in preschool, school and after-school programs. School physical-fitness programs should be enhanced and campus facilities made available for after-hours use by children.

Lisa M. Sodders, (818) 713-3663

lisa.sodders@dailynews.com

Copyright © 2005
Los Angeles Newspaper Group
More kids overweight in Bay Area, California
Study reports rise of 6.2 percent in the region over the last three years

By Rebecca Vesely, STAFF WRITER

The number of overweight children is rising in the Bay Area and California, according to a study released today that reports the data by Assembly district.

Statewide, the prevalence of overweight children rose by 6.2 percent in three years, according to the study, conducted by the nonprofit, nonpartisan California Center for Public Health Advocacy.

Assemblywoman Wilma Chan, D-Oakland, chairwoman of the Assembly Health Committee, saw a slight increase in overweight children in her district. In 2001, 27.2 percent of children in Chan's 16th District were overweight. In 2004, 27.8 percent were.

Some Bay Area Assembly districts saw increases far higher.

Assemblyman Johan Klehs, D-San Leandro, had a jump of 15.8 percent in his 18th district. In 2001, 25 percent of children in the district — which includes Pleasanton, Hayward, Dublin and parts of Oakland — were overweight. By 2004, 29 percent of children there were overweight.

District 15, represented by Assemblyman Guy Spencer Houston, R-Livermore, had lower percentage of overweight children, but an 11.7 percent increase. In 2001, 17.9 percent of children in that district were overweight. In 2004, 20 percent were overweight.

Assemblyman Alberto Torrico, D-Fremont, saw an 8 percent increase in overweight children in his 20th district, up to 24.4 percent from 22.6 percent.

The figures in the report were based on data from the 2004 and 2001 California Fitness Test, which is administered in public schools to fifth-, seventh- and ninth-graders.

Data are reported by state Assembly district to gain attention from policymakers and their constituents.

Dr. Anthony Iton, Alameda County's public health officer, said he was disappointed but not surprised by the report.
"We're the largest state in the nation, and the amount of resources we've committed to this epidemic is pathetic," Iton said. "This means looking seriously at schools and how our environment are designed, including suburban sprawl."

Iton said while the California Fitness Test isn't a perfect benchmark, it is reliable data because the test is administered consistently across school districts.

Overweight children are more likely than fit children to become obese adults and suffer from health problems such as diabetes and heart disease.

More than a third of the state's Assembly districts saw double-digit increases in overweight children, and the Los Angeles area fared worse than any other region, according to the report.

Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, D-Los Angeles, had the highest percentage of overweight children of all districts, at 39.1 percent.

"No one can be proud of these numbers," said Dr. Harold Goldstein, executive director of the California Center for Public Health Advocacy. "Our elected leaders must respond boldly and decisively to safeguard the children they were elected to protect."

Contact Rebecca Vesely at rvesely@angnewspapers.com.
Oh, Torrico: Your area's kids put on pounds
Nonpartisan group hopes to grab lawmakers' attention by reporting health data by district

By Rebecca Vesely, STAFF WRITER

The number of overweight children is rising both locally and statewide, according to a study released today that reports the data by state Assembly district.

Assemblyman Alberto Torrico, D-Newark, saw an 8 percent increase in overweight children in his 20th district over three years — up to 24.4 percent from 22.6 percent — according to the study, conducted by the nonprofit, nonpartisan California Center for Public Health Advocacy.

The 20th district covers Fremont, Newark, Union City, Milpitas, and parts of San Jose, Hayward, Castro Valley and Pleasanton.

Overall, the state's prevalence of overweight children increased by 6.2 percent in three years, according to the study.

Some Bay Area Assembly districts, though, saw far greater increases.

Assemblyman Johan Klehs, D-San Leandro, had a jump of 15.8 percent in his 18th district. In 2001, 25 percent of children in the district — which includes Pleasanton, Hayward, Dublin and parts of Oakland — were overweight. By 2004, 29 percent of children there were overweight.

District 15, represented by Assemblyman Guy Spencer Houston, R-Livermore, had a lower percentage of overweight children, but an 11.7 percent increase. In 2001, 17.9 percent of children in that district were overweight. In 2004, 20 percent were overweight.

Assemblywoman Wilma Chan, D-Oakland, who chairs the Assembly Health Committee, saw only a slight increase in overweight children in her district. In 2001, 27.2 percent of children in Chan's 16th District were overweight. In 2004, 27.8 percent were.

The figures in the report were based on data from the 2004 and 2001 California Fitness Test, which is administered in public schools to fifth-, seventh- and ninth-graders.

Data are broken down by state Assembly district to gain attention from policy-makers and their constituents.

Dr. Anthony Iton, Alameda County's public health officer, said he was disappointed
but not surprised.

"We're the largest state in the nation, and the amount of resources we've committed to this epidemic is pathetic," Iton said. "This means looking seriously at schools and how our environment (is) designed, including suburban sprawl."

While the California Fitness Test isn't a perfect benchmark, it provides reliable data because the test is administered consistently across school districts, Iton said.

More than a third of the state's Assembly districts saw double-digit increases in overweight children, and the Los Angeles area fared worse than any other region, the report found.

"No one can be proud of these numbers," said Dr. Harold Goldstein, executive director of the California Center for Public Health Advocacy. "Our elected leaders must respond boldly and decisively to safeguard the children they were elected to protect."
Editorial
Don't go soft on drink ban
Extend soda law to high schools

August 25, 2005

It's unclear whether purveyors of sodas in our schools have seen the light, or are simply hiding behind a clever smoke screen. Last week, the American Beverage Association, which represents 85 percent of the nation's soda makers, announced a voluntary policy limiting the availability of soft drinks in schools. Under its new policy, soda makers will sell only water and 100 percent juices in elementary schools. In middle schools, during school hours, vending machines may sell diet soft drinks, water, 100 percent juices, dairy-based beverages and diet juice drinks. At high schools, no more than 50 percent of the vending slots may be filled with carbonated soft drinks.

"Childhood obesity is a real problem," Susan Neely, the beverage association's president and CEO, told The Associated Press. "The individual companies have been doing several things to be part of the solution and there was an agreement among all of our leadership that we needed to take another step and take it as an industry." In some quarters, the policy change is seen as a calculated move by the soda industry to blunt tough laws regulating soft-drink sales, particularly in high schools. Not so, says the industry. The guidelines mark a new commitment to offer beverages that provide variety, nutrition and fewer calories to students.

What's not in dispute is that more and more states are enacting comprehensive laws that limit students' access to sugar-rich sodas in an attempt to fight the growing problem of childhood obesity. California is one of them.

In 2003, the Legislature banned the sales of all soft drinks in middle and elementary schools. Lawmakers are now considering a bill, authored by state Sen. Martha Escutia, D-Whittier, that extends the ban to public high schools. To their credit, some Ventura County highs schools, including Foothill Technology and Pacific in Ventura, and all high schools in the Oxnard Union High School District, have already phased out sodas from vending machines.

While The Star applauds the soda industry's new soft-drink policy in schools, it does not go far enough. We urge state lawmakers to approve Sen. Escutia's SB965, and not to be dissuaded by some voluntary guidelines that do not adequately address high schools, where most school soda purchases are made. More than a quarter of California school children are overweight, and they're getting heavier, according to a study to be released today by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy. The study shows that 28 percent of children statewide are overweight, up 6 percent from...
2001. Research has shown that excessive soda consumption contributes to weight gain among children.

By adopting strict soda bans at all grade levels, the state and schools will be helping students make sound nutritional choices.
Study: Area kids' weight growing issue

Annette Wells, Staff Writer

If the waistlines of California's school-aged children continue expanding, we could be facing the nation's first generation of children with shorter life expectancies than their parents.

Many of those children are right here in San Bernardino and Riverside counties, according to a study by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy.

"The deck is stacked against our children," Dr. Harold Goldstein, executive director of the nonprofit Davis-based organization whose study is to be released today. "Clearly, not enough has been done."

The Sun examined the childhood obesity epidemic in its four-day series, "Table to Grave," in May. Experts said overweight children are at risk for diabetes and other chronic diseases, and more likely to be obese as adults.

The new study analyzed the 2004 Physical Fitness test, a measurement of fitness levels of fifth-, seventh- and ninth-grade students.

Data was broken down by Assembly districts.

A similar analysis was done in 2002 on the 2001 physical fitness test.

Overall in California, the prevalence of overweight children has increased by 6.2 percent since 2001. But the increases have been higher in individual Assembly districts, such as San Bernardino and Riverside counties' 36, 59, 61, 62 and 63 districts.

For example, in Assemblyman Joe Baca Jr.'s 62nd District, the increase was 9.75 percent from 2001. That means, 35 out of every 100 children in that district are considered overweight.

"This does concern me," said Baca, whose district includes San Bernardino, Fontana, Rialto and Colton, as well as unincorporated Bloomington and Muscoy.

"Everything has been so convenient, fast food and snacks, we can just grab them on the go," he said. "What it comes down to is people need to start taking care of their bodies."

The 61st District of Assemblywoman Gloria Negrete McLeod increased 10 percent, according to data. Her district includes the cities of Pomona, Chino, Montclair and Ontario.

In a written statement, McLeod said, she too was concerned with the study's results.

Goldstein said the study was conducted by Assembly districts to generate more feedback and efforts from legislators.
However policy makers have been slow to act since the last study.

"Given the amount of media attention to obesity recently, we did not expect this level of increase,' Goldstein said.

"It really shows that information and education alone aren't enough.'

Melodee Lopez, a nutritionist for San Bernardino County's Public Health Department, said laws that discourage the sale of beverages and junk foods in schools need to be pushed forward.

Since the 2002 study was released, Lopez said, there has been very little communication between assembly members and public health.

Though efforts have been made in recent years, Lopez said they have been spotty and aren't being replicated.
School kids getting heavier, study shows

By Kimm Groshong, Staff Writer

PASADENA -- Poor eating habits and a lack of exercise continue to take their toll on the state's youths, according to a new study.

In Carol Liu's 44th Assembly District, nearly 28 percent of fifth-, seventh- and ninth-graders were deemed overweight last year. That marks an increase of almost 11 percent since 2001.

The study, to be released today by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy, examined weight-related physical fitness test scores of California students and compared them to those from 2001.

The researchers found that the number of overweight students in the state increased more than 6 percent over the four-year period to an average of 28.1 percent.

"We, quite frankly, were shocked by the findings," said Harold Goldstein, the advocacy group's executive director. "Given the media attention that this epidemic has already received, we didn't expect to see the numbers continuing to increase. We really think this is a public health disaster.'

Statewide, more than 1.2 million public school students included in the study took the state's mandated Fitnessgram test. The CCPHA found that of those students, 33.9 percent of boys and 22.0 percent of girls were overweight reporting a body mass index above the test's acceptable range, or Healthy Fitness Zone, for their age and gender.

In the 44th Assembly District, the most overweight students were found to be Latino (36.9 percent), with American Indian/Alaska Native (34.8 percent) and Pacific Islander (34.5 percent) populations following. And as with the state, Asian students had the lowest rate in the district, 16.0 percent.

Overweight teenagers are much more likely to become obese adults, putting them at high risk for developing a variety of medical conditions, including high cholesterol, high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes and depression.

That's why "it's very important for us to try to address it as early as possible," said Takashi Wada, health officer for the Pasadena Public Health Department. "Whenever we're talking about trying to change behavior, it's very difficult and it's a long process. But you have to start somewhere.'

Paula Verrette, director of Huntington Hospital's Healthy Eating Lifestyle Program, said the new study reconfirms that there is a problem of epidemic proportions in our society. "I think that we can say that we have a certain uniqueness to our area,' she said. "But when it comes to this issue, we're all pretty much in the same circumstance.'

She said the key to addressing the problem is education and empowerment of parents. "The message is to get educated on nutrition facts. ... You look at the scope of the problem and you can use that as a call to change,' Verrette said. "But what you change is your own family environment.'
Goldstein disagreed, saying, "It's pretty clear that information and education alone aren't going to solve the crisis." He said that although it's important that young people take personal responsibility and that parents teach their children to make healthy choices, public policy changes are needed to protect children and reinforce those lessons. "Schools have become soda and junk food superstores. Companies are marketing directly to kids. ... The deck is really stacked against our kids."

He said approval of two bipartisan bills currently in the state Assembly would be a step in the right direction. One would extend California's ban on soda sales at elementary and middle schools to also include high schools. The other would put stronger restrictions on junk food sales in public schools.

Liu said by and large she supports the bills so long as good alternatives are provided and students in ethnic clubs still have the opportunity to share their diverse foods with fellow students.

"But more importantly, I think we need to get back to offering physical education as a natural. It has to be a combination of these things to make kids holistic and natural and healthy," Liu said.

Like Liu, Wada said the solution has to incorporate both policy change and increased education for children and their parents. To take such a dual-pronged approach, he said the Pasadena Public Health Department and its partners in the PUSD and throughout Pasadena have teamed up.

For example, he said, the PUSD is "really making an effort to improve the quality of food and the nutritional content of food at PUSD schools."

Also, the Food Policy Council is trying to make Pasadena more walkable by evaluating areas where people can walk and exercise in the city.

And a recent grant from the California Endowment will enable a team comprising the Health Department, the Bill Moore Community Health Clinic and the Madison Neighborhood Partners to evaluate the quality of food at grocery stores in Northwest Pasadena. They hope to eventually incorporate more nutritious, higher-quality fruits and vegetables in the stores and limit junk food ads, Wada said.

Kimm Groshong can be reached at (626) 578-6300, Ext. 4451, or by e-mail at kimm.groshong@sgvn.com.
More county children are overweight
But the increase is smaller here than the state average, study shows

By Jeff Ballinger
The Tribune
August 25, 2005

A growing number of children are overweight in California and in San Luis Obispo County, though the increase from 2001 is smaller here than the state average.

A study by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy shows that 26.3 of all children are overweight in state Assembly District 33, which includes all of San Luis Obispo County and parts of Santa Barbara County. The self-described nonpartisan, nonprofit group that prepared the study pulled data from the 2004 California Physical Fitness Test, which is administered in fifth, seventh and ninth grades.

The study was released today, two days after a separate national study came out that reported 21.5 percent of all Californians are obese.

The local number of overweight children is up more than 3 percent from three years before -- the last time the study was conducted -- when the rate was 25.5 for every 100 children.

The state percentage is 28.1, up more than 6 percent from 2001. More than a third of Assembly districts saw double-digit increases.

Although local boys are much more likely to be overweight than girls, and Asian children are leaner than any other group, being overweight or obese is widespread, said Amy Gilman, a Paso Robles health consultant connected to the study.

"It's not limited to certain groups of people or economic classes," she said. "Everyone's affected by it."

Local children may be a bit healthier than their peers statewide, Gilman said, because families in this county are generally more affluent than much of the rest of the state.

The high cost of living is a likely factor statewide in the increase, Gilman said, as parents work harder and longer hours.

"People have less money to put into food," she said, "so that means less quality food is being purchased."

Gilman and the advocacy group have several policy recommendations, including:

• Provide healthier food and beverage standards in preschool, school and after-school programs.
• Eliminate the advertising of unhealthy foods to children.

• Ensure all students receive physical education that meets minimum standards.

• Make school recreational facilities available for children and families after hours.

Parents have a challenging situation, however, given the constant onslaught of advertising images for sugary sodas their children encounter daily, said Dr. Tom Maier, the county’s director of Community Health.

"There isn't a simple solution, and it isn't something where we can turn the tide quickly," he said.

"It's going to be up to all parts of our society, and parents are the key."

Maier said a local group is trying to make a difference. Both he and Gilman are members of the Gold Coast Collaborative, the local chapter of a statewide health advocacy group.

It includes Cal Poly professors, local school teachers and health professionals, among others. Gilman said one of their main goals is supporting bills currently before the Assembly that would reduce the availability of sodas and junk food at schools and another that would improve school physical fitness programs.

Senior staff writer Jeff Ballinger can be reached at 781-7908 or jballinger@thetribunenews.com.
Childhood obesity continues to rise
Study finds Valley percentages outpace state

By Esther Chou, Staff Writer

The San Gabriel Valley has more overweight children as a percentage than California overall, according to a study released today by a health advocacy group.

Statewide, 28.1 percent of children are overweight, compared with 29.2 percent locally, according to the California Center for Public Health Advocacy.

The number of overweight children in California has increased 6.2 percent in three years.

In some areas, about one-third of the children are overweight. Such is the case in the 57th Assembly District, where the overweight rate is 34.3 percent. The district includes Azusa, Baldwin Park, Covina, La Puente and West Covina.

"Though we may all know there's a problem, far too little has been done to address the childhood obesity epidemic. The crisis is getting worse," said Harold Goldstein, the center's executive director.

The increase affects every ethnicity, age and gender group studied. Boys are more likely to be overweight than girls, and Pacific Islanders have the highest percentage of overweight children, with Latino children following.

Poor diet and a lack of regular physical activity are to blame.

"We don't do physical exercise anymore," said Dr. Robert Riewerts, chief of pediatrics at Kaiser Permanente Baldwin Park Medical Center. "We have adjusted to a new lifestyle of doing less exercise and eating more fast food and eating out more."

Television, video games and the computer also contribute to the increased number of overweight children.

Children who watch more than one hour of television a day are at higher risk of becoming overweight, according to Dr. Daina Dreimane, a physician at Childrens Hospital Los Angeles. Instead, children should be active, walking, playing, enjoying physical activity, but not necessarily playing a sport.

"Even wandering around the house and into the yard would be much, much better than just sitting and looking at a screen," Dreimane said.

Overweight children are more likely to develop diseases that previously didn't exist in children, such as Type 2 diabetes or nonalcoholic steatohepatitis, or fatty liver disease, according to Riewerts.

Though children may not suffer from the symptoms now, they are likely to be plagued with health problems as adults, according to Riewerts.

Susan Delgado, director of food services at Mountain View School District in El Monte, said
schools should offer students alternatives that they want to eat but are also healthy.

When she plans menus, Delgado said she always looks for an alternative that has less fat or lower sodium. The district tries to offer a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables and doesn't allow the sale of soft drinks.

For example, when students crave ice cream on a hot day, the school offers them a frozen treat sweetened with pear juice. Or, they sell pizza that has mozzarella cheese instead of a higher-fat cheese like cheddar.

This year, the district will expand its salad bar program to the elementary schools, according to Delgado.

"The habits we develop as children, they affect us later on, our food preferences included," Delgado said. "What we have to try and advocate through our program is healthful choices."

---

**Overweight students**

A study by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy found the following rates of overweight children. Among the 88,355 students tested in the East San Gabriel Valley, 29.2% were overweight in 2004.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>49th District</th>
<th>(Assemblywoman) Judy Chu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All students</strong> 2004</td>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51.1%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>57th District</th>
<th>(Assemblyman) Ed Chavez</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All students</strong> 2004</td>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>58th District</th>
<th>(Assemblyman) Ronald S. Calderon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All students</strong> 2004</td>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>59th District</th>
<th>(Assemblyman) Dennis Mountjoy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All students</strong> 2004</td>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>60th District</th>
<th>(Assemblyman) Bob Huff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All students</strong> 2004</td>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

-- Esther Chou can be reached at (626) 962-8811, Ext. 2513, or by e-mail at esther.chou@sgvn.com.

Copyright © 2005 San Gabriel Valley Tribune
Los Angeles Newspaper Group
Study finds alarming rise in childhood obesity

By Pam Wight , Staff Writer

WHITTIER -- Whittier children are getting steadily and dangerously fatter, according to a new study being released today that breaks down child obesity rates by state Assembly districts.

Updating an earlier study based on 2001 figures, the California Center for Public Health Advocacy found that childhood obesity rose 6.2 percent statewide and 11 percent in Whittier and Santa Fe Springs, which are in the 56th Assembly District.

"I personally was shocked by these findings,' said Harold Goldstein, the center's executive director. "We didn't expect to find these kinds of increases with all of the public attention on the issue. It shows that education is not enough.'

The study found that nearly 90 percent of Assembly districts saw an increase in the number of overweight children.

Assemblyman Rudy Bermudez, D-Norwalk, of the 56th Assembly District said education is the key to lowering child obesity rates.

"It involves family and the home, educating people on healthier choices,' he said, adding he believes nutrition education should begin in preschool.

But Bermudez said he does not favor banning junk food from school campuses, a proposal strongly supported by state Sen. Martha Escutia, whose pending bill, SB 12, would completely ban junk food from all schools.

"How do you prevent kids from bringing it from home? Selling junk food at schools is not the problem,' Bermudez said. "Some parents don't pay attention to what their kids eat. We must educate people.'

Goldstein said the study's results show that efforts by some school districts and individual efforts aren't enough.

He said parents need to enlist their city, county and state officials to change their community's environment to counteract a pervasive marketing juggernaut that bombards children every day with images of junk food and sugar-filled drinks.

"Think of how the world is designed outside your house,' Goldstein said. "It's OK to have junk food, there are no after-school programs that get kids moving, schools have become junk food outlets, increased food availability, etc.

"How did it happen? It happened because of choices often made by elected officials.'
He said what was needed was a campaign similar to the massive national anti-smoking effort in the 1970s and 1980s that many credit for a sharp decline in smoking among adults.

"The solution needs to be much more comprehensive than the schools,' Goldstein said.

Obesity-related illnesses cost $90 billion a year in health-care costs, according to the center. Overweight people increase their chances of acquiring heart disease, stroke, osteoarthritis and different types of cancer. Increases in diabetes have also been linked to child obesity.

In the 58th Assembly District, which includes Montebello and Pico Rivera, childhood obesity rates increased 5 percent.

But the rate decreased by about 2 percent in the 60th Assembly District, which covers La Habra.

"Most of our residents from the foothill communities are professionals and are probably ahead of the curve on health awareness,' said Assemblyman Bob Huff of the 60th District.

"I would generally support limiting sugary drinks, even though I don't like to tell people what to do. I do think we need some responsible guidelines.'

Pam Wight can be reached at (562) 698-0955, Ext. 3029, or by e-mail at pam.wight@sgvn.com.
Efforts to halt obesity failing state children

By Sandy Kleffman
CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Despite intense publicity surrounding the nation's obesity crisis, the prevalence of overweight children in California rose 6 percent in the past three years.

That's disheartening news to the legions of parents, teachers and public health advocates who have worked hard to curb the problem.

The increase occurred among all racial, gender and age groups, according to a study released today by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy.

"We were shocked to see these findings," said Harold Goldstein, the center's executive director. "It's a personal and medical disaster.

"What it shows really clearly is that information and education alone isn't enough to solve this crisis."

Overweight children are at increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes, orthopedic problems and high blood pressure.

About 75 percent will become obese adults, increasing their odds of developing heart disease, stroke, osteoarthritis and several forms of cancer.

Goldstein urged government leaders to enact policies that limit the mixed messages children are receiving.

"Everywhere our children turn, they are bombarded with messages that undermine their parents' efforts," he said.

The study recommends that schools set standards on the levels of fat, sugar and calories in the foods available on campus, and ensure that everyone participates in physical education programs overseen by credentialed teachers.

Communities should make it convenient to walk, bicycle or use wheelchairs, and advertising of junk food to youngsters should be restricted, the study says.

It also suggests that officials provide financial incentives to lure grocery stores with fresh produce, farmers markets and recreation facilities to low-income communities.

Researchers based their findings on data from the 2004 California Physical Fitness Test, given to fifth-, seventh- and ninth-graders in public schools.
A similar study in 2001 found that 26.5 of every 100 students were overweight based on their body mass index, which is calculated by comparing weight to height.

Three years later, despite intensive campaigns promoting healthy eating and physical activity, the rate of overweight children had climbed to 28.1 per 100 students, the study found.

"This shows that a focus on individual responsibility is not working," said Deanna Niebuhr, director of health programs for the Bay Area Partnership for Children and Youth. She was not involved with the study.

Niebuhr and Goldstein support a Healthy Schools Now proposal announced last month by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. It would extend a statewide ban on soft drinks from lower grades to high schools.

The governor also wants to tighten nutrition standards on foods that can be sold at schools.

The proposals are contained in two bills by state Sen. Martha Escutia, D-Norwalk, that are moving through the Legislature.

Contra Costa leaders are tackling the issue on several fronts, including adopting an ordinance requiring that 50 percent of all food items in vending machines on county property meet U.S. Department of Agriculture standards for healthy foods.

The county provides nutrition education, a weight loss clinic and after-school programs with healthy snacks and physical activities. It also gives financial support to a fresh produce stand in North Richmond.

A new federal law will require each school to establish a wellness policy by September 2006 that includes nutrition guidelines for foods on campus and a plan for reducing obesity.

Parents who want to help draft such plans should contact their superintendents' office, she said.

The next battle for public health advocates may be seeking restrictions on the multibillion-dollar advertising campaigns for soda and fast food companies targeted to children, Goldstein said.

"The truth is this marketing is designed to encourage kids to make unhealthy choices," he said.

Staff writer Sandy Kleffman is a general assignment and health reporter. Reach her at 925-943-8249 or skleffman@cctimes.com.
Valley kids at lead of girth trend
One-third of area youth overweight, 2004 test finds

Erica Solvig
The Desert Sun
August 25, 2005

A third of the Coachella Valley's kids are overweight, placing the region among the highest childhood obesity rates in the state.

And despite increased education efforts, the number continues to rise.

The local snapshot of a national problem is part of a study to be released today by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy.

It's not just the numbers that are alarming to parents, health experts and school officials. It's the worry that the epidemic will lead to an increase in other health problems, such as Type 2 diabetes and obesity among adults.

"The numbers are shocking," Dr. Harold Goldstein, the health agency's executive director, said in a phone interview.

"We did not expect to see this level of increase. This is a public health disaster."

Fitness testing

The study is based on the 2004 California Physical Fitness Test that's given to fifth-, seventh- and ninth-graders.

Statewide, 26.5 students out of 100 were considered overweight in the 2001 fitness test. The 2004 test on which today's study is based shows 28.1 out of 100 fall into that category - a 6 percent jump in just three years.

The statistics are not compared to national trends because the study is based on a test only California administers. Nationwide numbers are based on other indicators.

More children overweight

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>80th Dist.</th>
<th>California</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All students tested in grades 5, 7 and 9</td>
<td>33.20%</td>
<td>28.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>26.80%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>39.60%</td>
<td>33.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th-graders</td>
<td>34.10%</td>
<td>29.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th-graders</td>
<td>35.40%</td>
<td>29.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th-graders</td>
<td>29.90%</td>
<td>25.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>24.50%</td>
<td>28.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>47.70%</td>
<td>31.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>28.90%</td>
<td>17.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>24.90%</td>
<td>24.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>35.60%</td>
<td>35.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>35.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>24.50%</td>
<td>20.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>31.00%</td>
<td>24.40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: THE CALIFORNIA CENTER FOR PUBLIC HEALTH ADVOCACY

FRED FIGUEROA, THE DESERT SUN

"The numbers are shocking," Dr. Harold Goldstein, the health agency's executive director, said in a phone interview.

"We did not expect to see this level of increase. This is a public health disaster."
The figures are broken down by state Assembly districts, and the vast majority of them - including the 80th Assembly District - have seen an increase since the 2001 test results were released.

Three years ago, the 80th Assembly District was at 31.1 percent.

**Limiting video games**

While alarming, the figures were no surprise to Mark Ratliff. Though his two boys are "skinny," the Palm Desert father said he sees heavier children at 9-year-old Austin's and 13-year-old Garrett's school and recreation activities.

He and his wife, Jodi, keep their children fit by serving a nutritious breakfast and cooking well-balanced dinners.

The Ratliffs also forbid video games during the week. So instead of vegging in the house when their schoolwork is done, the boys head outside to swim, ride bikes or skateboard.

"They're active when they go out," Mark Ratliff said. "There are no video games Monday through Thursday. There's no TV past 8:30 p.m."

**Social attitudes**

Part of the reason the Coachella Valley saw such a rise is because of its diverse makeup, according to Bill Lawrence, a deputy director of the Riverside County Public Health Department.

The percentage of overweight children was highest among Pacific Islanders, at 35.9 percent; Latinos, at 35.4 percent; American Indian/Alaska natives, at 31.7 percent; and African Americans, at 28.7 percent.

Non-Latino white children and Asian children had lesser percentages.

"It's just changing social attitudes as far as what's healthy. That's key," Lawrence said. "It becomes everyone's responsibility, not just the child's or the parent's but society's, that we implement policies that guide personal choices."

Goldstein, of the California Center for Public Health Advocacy, added that "where we live impacts our choices."

**Recommendations**

Along with the study, the center is to issue today a series of recommendations that include having safe walking and biking paths in communities and having school recreation areas available for after-hours use.

"Some part of it is personal choice, but we make our choice in the environment in which we live," Goldstein said. "If you live in a community that has mostly unhealthy food available, you're much more unlikely to eat healthy foods."

Several bills that would regulate meals and snacks sold in schools already are pending in the state Legislature.

And some schools are already trying to curb the problem.
Meredy Shoenberger, a member of the Palm Springs Unified School District Board of Education and a self-described "vending machine cop," said soft drinks are no longer offered in elementary and middle school vending machines in her district.

Board members have also talked to their food service officials about cutting down on calories and fat grams in the meals that the school offers.

"But we cannot eliminate what kids bring from home," Shoenberger said. "All one has to do is walk around and look at the kids, for crying out loud. They're just not eating healthy. Kids are just not into celery sticks and carrots."
Rapid rise in rate of obesity for Marin kids

Richard Halstead
August 25, 2005

Marin's children are becoming overweight at nearly three times the statewide rate, according to a study released yesterday by a nonprofit public advocacy group.

The survey by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy lists the number of overweight kids throughout California by Assembly district - for maximum political effect.

The percentage of 6th District children in grades five, seven and nine who were overweight increased to 20.53 per 100 children in 2004, from 17.54 per 100 children in 2001 - an increase of more than 17 percent. Obesity rates were significantly higher among black and Latino students. The 6th District includes all of Marin and a portion of southern Sonoma County.

Statewide, the percentage of children in those grades who were overweight increased 6 percent to 28.1 per 100 children in 2004, from 26.5 per 100 children in 2001.

The data was collected from approximately 1.375 million children in grades five, seven and nine from 7,624 schools who took the physical fitness test. Nearly all the students assessed were determined to be overweight based on body mass index.

There are still fewer overweight kids in Marin than most other California counties, said Larry Meredith, director of the Marin County Department of Health and Human Services. Marin ranks in the bottom 10 percent, Meredith said.

"What is disturbing is the rate of increase over the last three years," Meredith said.

One reason for the rapid increase is denial, Meredith said.

"Many in Marin don't feel it's a problem for themselves, their family and their community," Meredith said. "The obesity epidemic is here in Marin."

The numbers are of special concern because overweight children are at risk for diabetes and other chronic diseases, are more likely to be obese as adults and suffer from expensive preventable illnesses, and may die prematurely.

The results of two other studies yesterday highlighted the nationwide scope of the obesity problem.

The Davis-based advocacy group Trust for America's Health reported that 22.7 percent of American adults were obese in the 2002-04 period, up from 22 percent in 2001-03. California was slightly below the national average with 22.2 percent of

Harvard’s School of Public Health also issued a report showing that fast-food restaurants in Chicago are clustered within easy walking distance of elementary and high schools. The researchers said the pattern probably exists in urban areas nationwide and is likely contributing to the nation's obesity epidemic.

Public Health Advocacy’s director, Dr. Harold Goldstein, said he was shocked that the statewide increase in the number of overweight children was so large given the amount of media attention obesity has received recently.

"What it means is that information and education alone aren't enough to solve the crisis," Goldstein said. "What is needed is to establish statewide policies to support parents in teaching their children to make the right choices."

Public Health Advocacy is backing two bills pending in the state Senate that were sponsored by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger. SB 12 would implement nutrition standards in elementary and secondary schools. For example, it would restrict the number of calories per food item sold at the schools to 250. Entrees could contain no more than 400 calories, and no more than four grams of fat per 100 calories. SB 965 would ban sodas and other high sugar drinks from high schools.

"I'm going to vote for both of them," said 6th District Assemblyman Joe Nation. But Nation said this legislation alone won't solve the problem. "There has to be a cultural shift as well," he said.

Public Advocacy has a number of recommendations on how to bring about such a shift. These include:

- Banning advertising of unhealthy foods and beverages to children.

- Instituting healthy food and beverage standards for all items available in schools, addressing levels of fat, sugar and calories.

- Establishing grocery stores with produce and other healthy items in all undeserved neighborhoods.

- Providing health plan benefits that cover nutrition counseling and exercise programs.

- Ensuring all children receive quality physical education.

- Making school recreational facilities available for after-hours use, especially in neighborhoods that lack safe and accessible facilities.

- Providing safe and convenient roadway access for people who walk and bicycle.

Miguel Villareal, who manages food and nutritional services for schools in Novato and San Rafael, said he has been attempting to reduce serving sizes and calorie counts
at the schools he oversees since being hired three years ago.

For example, Villareal removed donuts from the federally subsidized breakfast menu and replaced a jumbo muffin with a smaller, low-fat version. Since assuming supervision of the San Rafael schools in October, he has banned soft drinks.

"Maybe not to the delight of our customers," Villareal said.