

## **Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Statement Regarding Release of Estimates of Obesity Prevalence Among U.S. Children and Teens**

The following is a statement by Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, M.D., M.B.A., president and CEO of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation:

According to new National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) data, the prevalence of obesity and overweight among children and adolescents has not changed significantly between 2003 and 2006.

The apparent stabilization of childhood obesity rates over the last four years is encouraging, but we must not allow this new data to lull us into a sense of complacency. If obesity rates among children have hit a plateau, that plateau is still far too high.

The obesity rate is more than four times higher among children ages 6 to 11 than it was a generation ago. During the same time period, the rate has more than tripled among teens ages 12 to 19, and more than doubled among children ages 2 to 5. Today, nearly one-third of all children and adolescents in our country (more than 23 million youth) remain overweight or obese, placing them at heightened risk for heart disease, type 2 diabetes and a host of other serious diseases.

The NHANES statistics released today remind us of the urgency of the epidemic and the significant racial/ethnic disparities that exist. For example, non-Hispanic black and Mexican American girls are more likely to be obese than non-Hispanic white girls. Almost 28 percent of non-Hispanic black girls ages 12 to 19 and almost 20 percent of Mexican American girls ages 12 to 19 are obese, compared with 14.5 percent of non-Hispanic white girls. Among boys ages 2 to 19, Mexican Americans are significantly more likely to be obese than either non-Hispanic blacks or non-Hispanic whites. Almost 23 percent of Mexican American boys in that age range are obese, compared with 17.4 percent of non-Hispanic blacks and almost 16 percent of non-Hispanic whites.

These statistics reinforce the need to do all we can to make it easier for children to be active and eat healthy foods—especially in communities with the highest rates of obesity and the fewest resources.

The stabilization of childhood obesity rates may signal that this national epidemic is not an unstoppable force. When parents, government, schools, the food and beverage industries, other businesses, and the non-profit and philanthropic sectors work together, we can make progress, and we can reverse this epidemic.

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