

For Immediate Release
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Nearly Half of Local Children Aged 2 and Older are Overweight or Obese

*The month of September is National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month. This month is dedicated to a few objectives, including: raising awareness about this public health issue, promoting healthy growth in children, and ultimately preventing childhood obesity. **In this Press Release, we provide Coachella Valley statistics and resources to help promote healthy growth in children.***

Palm Desert, CA (September 9, 2020) — Childhood obesity is a serious health issue as children with obesity are at higher risk for other chronic health conditions and diseases, such as asthma, bone and joint problems, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.¹ More than physical health problems, it may also lead to long-term mental health problems, given that children who are in the obese weight category can sometimes be bullied and teased by their peers. Ultimately, this social rejection can cause children to be isolated, depressed, and have low self-esteem.²

The way to determine a child's body weight category is largely determined by using the body mass index (BMI). BMI is a measurement used to determine weight category, including underweight, healthy weight, overweight, and obesity. BMI is calculated by dividing a person's weight in kilograms by the person's square height in meters. For children and teenagers, there is an age-specific and sex-specific BMI. Childhood obesity can then be defined as a BMI at or above the 95th percentile, meaning that the child's BMI is greater than the BMI of 95% of the children in same age and sex.³

Coachella Valley Data

In the Coachella Valley, 46.1% of local children aged 2 and older have a BMI that puts them in the “overweight” or “obese” category -- this equates to roughly 25,790 children in the valley. However, when parents were asked on their perception on their child's weight, only 14.4% of the parents believed their child was

¹ September is National Childhood Obesity Month. (2020). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available online at: <https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/features/childhood-obesity/index.html>

² Ibid.

³ BMI for Children and Teens. (2018). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available online at: <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/childhood/defining.html>

overweight.⁴ With so many parents unaware that their child is overweight, these parents are less likely to make changes to the child's lifestyle that could support healthier development.

How to Support Your Child From Home

Addressing obesity as an issue starts from home and there are several ways that parents and caregivers can support a child's healthy growth. First, it is important to be aware of your child's BMI to measure for potential weight issues. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has a [Child and Teen BMI calculator](#) available for parents to use, and any concerns should certainly be discussed with the child's pediatrician or doctor. Regardless of the child's BMI, it is essential for children to have a healthy nutrition. Low-calorie foods with fruits and vegetables instead of foods with high amounts of added sugars and fats are a good start. Another way to promote healthy growth is making sure the child is drinking plenty of water while limiting high sugar drinks.

Equally important is for the child to incorporate physical activity to their lives. The CDC recommends that children should get 60 minutes of physical activity each day. Parents may find a list of age appropriate activity for a child by visiting the CDC's [Physical Activity Guidelines](#). Lastly, it is beneficial for children to develop healthy sleeping habits to encourage healthy growth and to improve the child's attention and brain functioning. Multiple studies have found that lack of sleep is associated with higher risks of weight gain and obesity.⁵

Certainly, we want our local children to experience a childhood that is healthy and happy. Moreover, behaviors in childhood lead to long-term habits that often carry them through much of their lives. It is critical to develop healthy habits so that a healthy weight can be maintained into adulthood leading to a long and vibrant life.

To learn more and find resources regarding Childhood Obesity Awareness Month and how to promote a healthy child growth, you may visit the following websites:

<https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/features/childhood-obesity/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/bmi/calculator.html>

<https://www.choosemyplate.gov>

<https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/children/index.htm>

To see more statistics regarding health information in the Coachella Valley, please see our latest 2019 Executive Report at: www.HARCdata.org

To schedule an interview with Dr. Jenna LeComte-Hinely call 760.404.1945 or email jlecomte-hinely@HARCdata.org.

⁴ Coachella Valley Community Health Survey. (2019). HARC. Available online at: <https://harcddata.org/coachella-valley-community-health-survey/executive-report/>

⁵ Molecular ties between lack of sleep and weight gain. (2016). National Institutes of Health. Available online at: <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/nih-research-matters/molecular-ties-between-lack-sleep-weight-gain>

About HARC

HARC, Inc. (Health Assessment and Research for Communities) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization providing research and evaluation services related to health and wellness. HARC is funded in part by grants, donations, and the consulting services they offer. More information can be obtained by calling HARC at 760.404.1945, or visiting the organization's website at: www.HARCdata.org

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