

# Report: National strategy needed to fight fat

## STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Report: Obesity rates swelled over last year in 31 states; no states saw decline
- First time a state has more than 30 percent obese: Mississippi
- Recommendation: National strategy needed to attack obesity

[Next Article in Health »](#)

READ

VIDEO

TEXT SIZE

(CNN) -- Americans are already among the fattest people in the world, and they just keep packing on the pounds. A new report finds that obesity rates have swelled during the last year in 31 states with not one state reporting that its obesity rate shrank.



Two-thirds of U.S. adults are obese or overweight, according to the Trust for America's Health.

And, for the first time, more than 30 percent of residents in one state -- Mississippi -- are classified as obese.

Nationwide, two-thirds of U.S. adults are obese or overweight, according to the fourth annual report from the Trust for America's Health, titled "F as in Fat: How Obesity Policies are Failing in America." The report's co-author says the government needs to treat this trend as an epidemic that threatens the health of Americans and put in place a national plan to combat obesity.

"The key recommendation in the report is we need a national strategy," said report co-author Jeffrey Levi.

He noted that the federal government has created a comprehensive plan to be implemented in the event

of an outbreak of pandemic flu. [Dr. Sanjay Gupta explains the new obesity numbers »](#)

"We need something like that in [obesity](#) that says this is what every agency of the federal government is doing. [It's] what we can do to directly affect this problem and motivate individual communities and businesses to play their role as well," Levi said.

In 32 states, 60 percent of the population is either overweight or obese. West Virginia ranks highest in the combined statistic, with nearly two-thirds of its adults obese or overweight.

## Fact Box

The Trust for America's Health suggests these programs might help cut obesity in the U.S.:

- Expand the Agriculture Department's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack program, which last year was used in just 400 schools in 14 states.
  - Restrict the sale of junk food in schools.
  - Increase food stamp benefits so recipients can afford fruits and vegetables
  - Subsidize farmers' markets to take Electronic Benefits Transfer cards from the Food Stamp Program
  - Give financial incentives to create more farmers' markets
- Source: Trust for America's Health

Mississippi, where almost one in three adults are obese, also ranks highest in adult hypertension and physical inactivity. It's tied with the District of Columbia in poverty and ranks second-highest in adult diabetes.

West Virginia came in second in the obesity ranking, followed by Alabama, Louisiana, South Carolina and Tennessee.

Nationwide, more than 25 percent of adults in 19 states are obese, up from 14 states last year.

"If you go back to 1991, only four states had obesity rates above 15 percent, and none exceeded 20 percent," said Levi.

Physical activity is linked to a reduced risk of dying prematurely. It also lowers one's risk of developing a host of diseases, including heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and colon cancer.

Obesity also affects the health of the nation's economy. Fat employees translate into fat medical bills for U.S. businesses trying to compete in an international marketplace.

A Duke University study that appeared in the Archives of Internal Medicine found 184 lost workdays per 100 obese full-time employees versus 14 lost workdays per 100 normal-weight full-time employees.

The average obese worker has up to 21 percent higher health care costs, the Duke report said.

A Medicare study found that obese patients cost the agency 15 percent more than normal or overweight patients.

Levi says individuals need the government's help to take control of their weight.

"People can't exercise personal responsibility in a vacuum," he said. "If you're telling people to eat healthier food and there are no grocery stores in the neighborhood; if you're telling them to be more physically active, and they live in poor, unsafe neighborhoods or in suburban neighborhoods with no sidewalks, then you've created an environment that doesn't make it possible for people to exercise that personal responsibility. That's where government plays a role."

And it's not just government agencies involved in public health that need to play a role, he said. Zoning boards are involved in building the sidewalks that encourage people to walk; school boards are involved in ensuring students get nutritious meals and physical education programs, he said.

## Don't Miss

[Coloradans get high fitness marks](#)

Trust for America's Health **2007 obesity report**

"Everyone has a role to play, starting with though not ending with the federal government," he said, noting that funding for relevant federal programs has been flat in recent years.