



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Overweight and Obesity Threaten U.S. Health Gains—Part I**

Health problems resulting from overweight and obesity could reverse many of the health gains achieved in the U.S. in recent decades, according to a Surgeon General's "call to action". The report, entitled "The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity," outlined strategies that communities can use in helping to address the problems. Those options included requiring physical education at all school grades, providing more healthy food options on school campuses, and providing safe and accessible recreational facilities for residents of all ages.

"Overweight and obesity are among the most pressing new health challenges we face today," HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson said. "Our modern environment has allowed these conditions to increase at alarming rates and become a growing health problem for our nation. By confronting these conditions, we have tremendous opportunities to prevent the unnecessary disease and disability they portend for our future."

"Overweight and obesity may soon cause as much preventable disease and death as cigarette smoking," Surgeon General David Satcher said. "People tend to think of overweight and obesity as strictly a personal matter, but there is much that communities can and should do to address these problems."

Approximately 300,000 U.S. deaths a year currently are associated with obesity and overweight (compared to more than 400,000 deaths a year associated with cigarette smoking). The total direct and indirect costs attributed to overweight and obesity amounted to \$117 billion in the year 2000.

In 1999, an estimated 61 percent of U.S. adults were overweight, along with 13 percent of children and adolescents. Obesity among adults has doubled since 1980, while overweight among adolescents has tripled. Only 3 percent of all Americans meet at least four of the five federal Food Guide Pyramid recommendations for the intake of grains, fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and meats. And less than one-third of Americans meet the federal recommendations to engage in at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity at least five days a week, while 40 percent of adults engage in no leisure-time physical activity at all.

While the prevalence of overweight and obesity has increased for both genders and across all races, ethnic and age groups, disparities exist. In women, overweight and obesity are higher among members of racial and ethnic minority populations than in non-Hispanic white women. In men, Mexican-Americans have a higher prevalence of overweight and obesity than non-Hispanic men, while non-Hispanic white men have a greater prevalence than non-Hispanic black men. Members of lower-income families generally experience a greater prevalence than those from higher-income families.

The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity is available at <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/obesity>

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