The Impact of Elementary School Physical Education Programs on Childhood Obesity

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Abstract

Obesity is currently recognized as a health threat to over half the population of the US, but the risks of being overweight aren’t limited to adults. The incidence of childhood obesity nearly doubled between 1980 and 1994, from six percent to eleven percent. Fifteen percent of children and adolescents between the ages of 6 and 19 are obese - a 300% increase over the previous forty years. Two factors make this finding especially problematic. First, 85% of obese children become obese adults. Second, obese children are being diagnosed with the same diseases as obese adults: cardiovascular disease and type II diabetes.

Although inadequate school-based physical education curricula have contributed to unsatisfactory outcomes to date, innovative and cost-effective school physical education programs hold the greatest potential for implementing physical activity and good nutrition in order to maintain health and fitness and reduce the incidence of childhood obesity. State and local school districts should require physical education for all students, and state and federal funding to school physical education departments should be increased in order to provide all children, from kindergarten through grade 12, with quality daily physical education.