

White House releases strategy to end childhood obesity epidemic

The White House has released a comprehensive action plan for ending the US childhood obesity epidemic - and its life-threatening consequences - by 2030. Published in a report by White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity, the action plan focuses on two critical strategies: improving eating habits and increasing physical activity.

The report highlights that one in every three American children is now overweight or obese, placing them at greater risk of developing non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like diabetes, heart disease, and cancer during their life. This is not only a national health crisis, but also an economic burden. Each year, the US currently spends nearly US\$150 billion to treat obesity-related medical conditions.

The action plan comprises 70 specific recommendations that address different behavioral risk factors associated with obesity. These recommendations were developed following a research review and consultations with experts as well as the broader public.

They can be broadly summarized as:

- Giving children a healthy start on life (through strengthened prenatal care; support for breastfeeding; evaluating the impact of chemical influences in the environment; limits on “screen time”; and quality child care settings with nutritious food and ample opportunities for physical activity)
- Empowering parents and caregivers to make healthy choices (through simpler, more actionable messages about nutritional choices; improved labels on food and menus; reduced marketing of unhealthy products to children; and improved health care services)
- Providing healthy food in schools (through improved federally supported school meals; upgrading the nutritional quality of other foods sold in schools; and improving nutrition education and the overall school environment)
- Improving access to healthy, affordable food (through eliminating “food deserts” in urban and rural America; lowering the relative prices of healthier foods; developing or reformulating food products to be healthier; and reducing the incidence of hunger)
- Getting children more physically active (through quality physical education, recess, and other opportunities in and after school; addressing aspects of the “built environment” that make it difficult for children to walk or bike safely in their communities; and improving access to safe parks, playgrounds, and indoor and outdoor recreational facilities).

While many of the recommendations are for activities to be undertaken by federal agencies, the report highlights that ending the US childhood obesity epidemic will also require action by parents, teachers, the private sector, communities, and state and local governments.

The Task Force will now work to develop a strategy for implementing the action plan.

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