



Health Equity Report

Obesity and Physical Activity

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Introduction

This Report takes a closer look at weight status, physical activity, and nutrition in the Capital Region.

Excessive calorie consumption, especially when paired with too little physical activity, can lead to becoming overweight and obese; which increases the risk of many health conditions including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, hypertension, osteoarthritis, liver disease, kidney disease, and some cancers.^{3,4} Regular physical activity promotes wellness by assisting with weight loss or preventing weight gain, strengthening muscles and bones, relieving arthritis pain, and improving mental health.¹⁰

Overweight and obesity are the second leading cause of preventable death in the United States and may soon overtake tobacco as the leading cause of death.⁵ By the year 2050, obesity is predicted to shorten life expectancy in the United States by two to five years.⁶ For the first time in history, children are predicted to have a shorter life span than their parents.⁷ Obesity is a major contributor to health care costs in the United States. Estimates range from \$147 billion to nearly \$210 billion per year. In addition, obesity-related job absenteeism cost approximately \$4.3 billion each year.^{8,9} Nationally, childhood obesity rates have remained stable over the last decade at around 17%, and adult obesity is still rising but beginning to slow. About 38% adults in the U.S. were obese with nearly 8% extremely obese (BMI 40+). Obesity was highest among Black non-Hispanic and Hispanics, compared to White non-Hispanic adults.⁹ Almost one-third of U.S. adults who earned < \$25,000 a year were obese compared to one-quarter who earned \$50,000 or more per year.⁸ Almost half of adults and nearly three-quarters of high school students nationally did not meet CDC's recommended physical activity levels.¹¹

While the 2015 obesity rate for NYS high school students (YRBS) of 13.1% was slightly lower than the national rate (13.9%), the rate increased 27% from 2005.¹⁷ However, when reviewing School Weight Status Category Reporting System (SWSCRS) data for Upstate NY, there was a slight decrease in obesity in school-age children between 2010-12 and 2014-16, suggesting a declining trend in obesity rates in public school children.¹⁸ In 2015, approximately 8.4 million adult NYS residents were considered obese with a rate of 25%. The New York State rate has been stable since 2011, and consistently lower than the nation.¹⁷ Black non-Hispanic and Hispanic New Yorkers had higher obesity rates compared to White non-Hispanic residents. The obesity rates were highest for residents with incomes less than \$25,000 per year.¹⁹ In 2015, only 23.3% of NYS high school students (YRBS) were physically active. This was a 7% decrease from 2011, and much lower than the national rate of 27.1%.¹² Less than half of NYS adults met the recommendations for aerobic activity in 2015, a rate lower than the U.S. rate. Hispanic adults had the lowest aerobic activity rate, followed by Asian non-Hispanic, Black non-Hispanic, and White non-Hispanic New York residents. The aerobic activity rate was lowest for residents with incomes less than \$15,000 per year.^{20, 21}

The Capital Region's public school children (SWSCRS) experienced a 4% decrease in the obesity rate from 2010-12 to 2014-16, a larger decrease than was seen in NYS. Approximately

196,000 Capital Region adults were obese and 450,000 were overweight or obese. The region's obesity rate of 27.8% was 14% higher than the NYS rate, but still lower than the national rate. Black non-Hispanic adult residents in the Capital Region had the highest obesity rate compared to the Hispanic and White non-Hispanic populations, who had similar rates. The low-income obesity rate was 35% higher than the overall obesity rate for the Capital Region. Capital Region adult residents participated in leisure time physical activity more often than NYS residents. Nonetheless, approximately 175,000 adult residents did not participate in any leisure time physical activity. The Capital Region White-non-Hispanic residents had higher rates of leisure time physical activity compared to the Hispanic and Black non-Hispanic populations.²² Disparities in the minority and low-income populations for obesity and physical activity were seen consistently across the nation, state, and region.

Previously published Healthy Capital District Initiative (HCDI) Health Equity Reports on [Diabetes](#)¹ and [Social Determinants of Health-Food and Housing](#)² also touched on nutrition, obesity and related health consequences. This Health Equity Report presents more detailed obesity, physical activity and diet indicators in its appendices: Appendix I– Federal and New York State Context; Appendix II-- Capital Region Comparisons; and Appendix III— County-specific information.

Obesity and Physical Activity Data Summary

Obesity

Children

- Obesity, and overweight or obesity rates in Capital Region school children have seen a slight decrease since 2010-12, with rates slightly lower than Upstate NY children.
- All Capital Region counties had school districts that fell into the 4th risk quartile for rates of obesity in school children. These school districts included both urban and rural areas.

Adult

- Obesity rates have been level or decreasing in New York State (NYS) over the past decade. NYS rates were lower than U.S. rates. The 2015 NYS adult obesity rate was the 8th lowest (best) state rate in the U.S.
- Approximately 196,000 Capital Region adults were obese, and 450,000 were overweight or obese in 2013-14. The adult Capital Region resident's age-adjusted obesity rate was 14% higher than the NYS rate (27.8% vs. 24.6%).
- Of the Capital Region counties, Schenectady (32.8%; 4th risk quartile of NYS counties) and Greene (31.4%; 3rd risk quartile) had the highest age-adjusted adult obesity rates.
- Black non-Hispanic adult Capital Region residents had 1.4 times the 2013-14 obesity rate (38.0%) compared to Hispanic (28.0%) and White non-Hispanic (27.7%) residents, and the low-income obesity rate was 35% higher than the overall obesity rate for the Capital Region (37.6% vs 27.8%).

Physical Activity

Children

- The 2015 physical activity rate (60+ minutes/day for last 7 days) for NYS high school students (23.3%) was 14% lower than the national rate. The 2015 NYS rate decreased 7% from the 2011.
- In 2015, in NYS high school students, use of computer/video games was up and TV watching was down; 37.2% used computers or played video games 3+ hours a day for fun outside of school work, 10% lower than the national rate. The NYS rate increased 11% from 2011. 24.2% of NYS high school students watched TV 3+ hours a day, similar to the national rate. The NYS rate was a 21% decrease from 2011.

Adult

- Physical Activity rates have been decreasing in NYS over the past five years. NYS rates were lower than comparable US rates. The 2015 NYS adult leisure time physical activity (LTPA) rate of 70.7% was the 12th poorest state rate in the US.
- In 2013-14, Capital Region adult residents participated in LTPA more often than NYS residents (age-adjusted 76.6% vs 72.9%). Still, approximately 175,000 adult residents did not participate in any leisure time physical activity.
- Greene County adult residents had the lowest age-adjusted rate of leisure time physical activity in the region (69.8%; 4th risk quartile), and was the only Capital Region county lower than the NYS rate.
- Capital Region adult LTPA rates were lower in minority populations. In 2013-14, Capital Region White-non-Hispanic residents had higher rates of LTPA (76.6%) compared to the Hispanic (72.5%) and Black non-Hispanic (71.4%) populations.

Perceived Barriers (2016 Community Health Survey)

In 2016, Capital Region adult residents identified the following as very significant or somewhat significant barriers to being physically active:

- Having access to a safe place to exercise—40%. Black non-Hispanic (57%) and Hispanic (56%) residents were more likely to identify this as a barrier compared to White non-Hispanic (37%) residents.
- Having the time it takes to exercise—62%. Black non-Hispanic residents (69%) were more likely than White non-Hispanic (62%) or Hispanic (59%) residents to identify this as a barrier.
- Cost with being physically active—52%. Black non-Hispanic (66%) and Hispanic (61%) residents were more likely to identify this as a barrier compared to White non-Hispanic (52%) residents. 60% of female residents identified this as a barrier compared to 45% for male residents.
- Knowledge of what physical opportunities of activities (e.g. walking trails, exercise classes) are available in my community—41%. Black non-Hispanic (58%) and Hispanic (48%) residents were more likely to identify this as a barrier compared to White non-Hispanic (39%) residents. Younger adults (18-35 years) identified this as a barrier (50%) compared to older residents.

Nutrition

2016 Community Health Survey

- In 2016, approximately 65% of Capital Region adults indicated that they ate a balanced, healthy diet 5 or more days per week. Males (61%), Hispanic (49%), and younger (50%) residents were least likely to eat healthy, balanced diets.
- About 15% of Capital Region adults indicated that they ate junk food (potato chips, pretzels, candy, French fries, pizza etc.) 5 or more days per week. Younger residents (18-34 years) were more likely to eat junk food (23%) compared to older residents.

Sugary Drinks

- The consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) has decreased in NYS over the past five years.
- In 2013-14, Capital Region adult residents consumed one or more sugary drinks daily at a 15% lower rate than NYS residents (20.9% vs 24.7%).
- For the Capital Region, Rensselaer County adults had the highest daily sugary drink consumption rate of 26.8% and was the only Capital Region county above the NYS rate.
- Capital Region sugary drink consumption rates were higher in younger, male, and minority populations.

Fast Foods

- In 2013-14, almost 40,000 adult Capital Region residents consumed fast-food three or more times per week. The region's age-adjusted rate of 5.9% was the same as the NYS rate.
- For the Capital Region, Rensselaer County adults had the highest age-adjusted fast-food consumption rate of 7.9%, while Saratoga County residents had the lowest at 4.0%.
- Capital Region fast food consumption rates were significantly higher in younger, male, and minority populations.

Data and Methods

See [attached](#) for more about the data sources and methods that went into this report.

Appendices

[Appendix I](#)- Detailed federal and state context.

[Appendix II](#)- Indicator comparisons by Capital Region County, Capital Region, and New York State.

[Appendix III](#)- County-specific obesity and physical activity data.

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