



## CHILDHOOD OBESITY: NYC

### THE FACTS

- In NYC public elementary schools, approximately 43% of children are overweight and more than 20% of students in that group are obese. Hispanic children have significantly higher levels of obesity than African American or white children; Asian children, with a 14.4% rate, have the lowest level of obesity among all racial/ethnic groups.<sup>1</sup>
- The prevalence of obesity in NYC is higher than the national average, which goes against the theory that there is an association between living in an area where walking is a common mode of transportation and an average healthy weight of that population.<sup>2</sup>
- Obesity worsens a variety of New York's most serious health problems including heart disease, stroke, asthma, depression, and diabetes.

### WHAT'S CHANGED IN NYC?

- As a population, we are eating more while engaging in less physical activity, which results in an aggregate weight gain. Super-sized fast food meals, cheap processed foods, more time in front of computer and TV screens, and decreased space for physical activity all contribute to this trend.
- New Yorkers, especially those living in poor areas, confront a food environment that encourages unhealthy eating habits. Low-income neighborhoods have more fast-food restaurants and take-out shops than supermarkets, promoting the purchase of unhealthy food.<sup>3</sup>
- Rising costs coupled with budget cuts continue to decimate school physical education, sports, and health programs.

### WHAT TO DO

- Cut back on fast food; replace high-sugar drinks with water, 100% fruit juice, or seltzer; and choose skim or 1% milk instead of whole milk.
- Encourage kids to exercise at least 20 minutes per day, three days a week and eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables per day.
- Enforce the New York State mandate that requires children have 120 minutes of physical education every week, during the school day.
- Seek partnerships and opportunities with like-minded agencies or organizations such as New York Road Runners and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, which are taking steps to increase opportunities for kids to engage in physical activity in the following ways<sup>4</sup>:
  - Making parks and other exercise spaces more accessible, safe, and inviting for all.
  - Creating and promoting safe walking and biking routes throughout local neighborhoods.
  - Organizing exercise sessions at workplaces and public spaces during lunch hours or recess, before and after school, and on weekends.
  - Promoting policies and programs that encourage parents and other caregivers to walk children to and from school.

<sup>1</sup> Thorn, et al, "Childhood Obesity in New York City Elementary School Students" American Journal of Public Health, September 2004, Vol 94, No. 9

<sup>2</sup> Van Wye G, et al. Obesity and diabetes in New York City, 2002 and 2004. *Prev Chronic Dis* 2008; 5(2). [http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2008/apr/07\\_0053.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2008/apr/07_0053.htm).

<sup>3</sup> New York City Department of Health & Mental Hygiene