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New Survey Shows Obesity Ranks Low on List of Ailments Parents Think Warrant Medical Attention

KANSAS CITY, Mo., August 30, 2011 – A new survey released today by [Children's Mercy Hospitals and Clinics](http://ChildrensMercy.org) in Kansas City shows more parents would find it “very important” to seek medical care for a child with diabetes symptoms (81%), asthma (80%) or a learning disability (74%), whereas only 54% of parents feel the same approach is needed for a child who is overweight.

Moreover, nearly all parents say they would seek medical attention for a condition that would limit their child's life expectancy (94%) or impact his or her future health care costs (93%).

“Despite the attention on the obesity epidemic, the disconnect found among parents regarding the long term outcomes associated with childhood obesity is concerning,” said [Sarah Hampl, MD](#), medical director, [Weight Management Services](#) at Children's Mercy. “Obese children have both immediate and future health problems, including hypertension, heart disease and diabetes. The survey illustrates that parents need help connecting the dots between having an overweight child and what their future health consequences may be.”

In addition to agreeing that parents have the greatest potential to prevent obesity (80%), parents are also looking to the schools for help, with six out of ten (59%) agreeing schools have a potentially great impact on preventing childhood obesity. Many parents are in favor of school policy changes including physical education requirements (92%) and restrictions on unhealthy foods at school fundraising activities (68%).

“It is evident that parents recognize that there is an issue and that they can have an impact on combating obesity,” said [John Lantos, MD](#), the hospital's Director of Pediatric Bioethics. “They need to set a healthy example and work with both physicians and schools to encourage a healthy lifestyle that includes physical activity, healthy habits and nutritious food.”

Other key findings from the *Perspectives on Pediatric Obesity* survey included:

- Few parents are supportive of extreme interventions for overweight children, including weight loss surgery (5%), medication (16%) or removal from their parents' custody (6%), and more parents support moderate interventions such as outpatient treatment programs (51%).
- Parents are supportive of proposed regulations that
 - Require healthy options in all public places that have vending machines (81%)

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- Require that health insurance companies cover obesity treatment (77%)
- Require sidewalks in all neighborhoods (76%)
- Strengthen regulations on food marketing to kids (73%)
- Control locations of fast food restaurants (for example, limiting placement near schools) (60%)
- Tax foods such as potato chips and sweets (39%)
- Full results of the survey can be found on the Children's Mercy website, <http://www.childrensmercy.org/>

Finding an Approach That Works

The [PHIT Kids \(Promoting Health in Teens and Kids\)](#) program at Children's Mercy takes a multi-dimensional approach to motivate families to make long-term lifestyle changes. Parents and 9-18 year old obese children work together to set achievable goals, including reducing sedentary behavior, limiting fast food consumption and participating in physical activity on a regular basis.

The program was honored by the National Initiative for Children's Healthcare Quality and boasts measureable results with both parents and children showing significant decreases in their Body Mass Index (BMI), triglyceride levels, and sugared beverage consumption, while increasing their HDL-cholesterol (good cholesterol), daily physical activity and meals eaten at home. Based on the success of PHIT Kids, a similar program has been developed for younger children, Zoom to Health.

The [Weight Management Services](#) team at Children's Mercy have also been working closely with community organizations and schools to make healthier food and physical activity options available to kids in school and childcare settings through the [Weighing In](#) childhood obesity collaborative. This program also seeks to inventory community capacity to support these and other childhood obesity prevention strategies.

About the Children's Mercy Hospitals and Clinics Childhood Obesity Survey

This survey was conducted online by Toluna from August 1 to 5, 2011 among a national sample of 2,179 American adults, including 728 parents. Parents answering the survey were adults who identified themselves as parenting at least one child under age 18. The total sample was representative of the US adult population in terms of age, gender and region. The margin of error for the total sample of 2,179 adults is $\pm 2.0\%$; the margin of error for the sample of 728 parents is $\pm 3.6\%$.

About Children's Mercy Hospitals and Clinics

Children's Mercy Hospitals and Clinics, located in Kansas City, Mo., is one of the nation's top pediatric medical centers. The 314-bed hospital provides care for children from birth through the age of 18, and has been recognized by the American Nurses Credentialing Center with Magnet designation for excellence in nursing services, and ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* as one of "America's Best Children's Hospitals" in all 10 specialties they rank. Our faculty of 600 pediatricians and researchers across more than 40 subspecialties are actively involved in clinical care, pediatric research, and educating the next generation of pediatric subspecialists. For more information about Children's Mercy and its research, visit childrensmercy.org or download our mobile phone app *CMH4YOU* for all phone types. For breaking news and videos, follow us on [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) and [Facebook](#).