Population Health: Nutrition, Physical Activity and Weight

This metadata page provides a brief summary of this dataset. More detailed data and metadata are available from the Data Sources listed to follow. Please also refer to the contact information on the last page under 'Questions?'

Definitions

Body Mass Index (BMI). A measure of health based on the height and weight of a person. Some researchers propose that body mass index or BMI 'does not take into account muscle mass, bone density, overall body composition,' or 'racial and sex differences'; and 'is an inaccurate measure of body fat content' (University of Pennsylvania, accessed May 2025)[1].' The way BMI is measured hasn't been changed since 1830. While being defined by your physician as 'overweight' or 'obese' has been shown to be risk factors for some diseases and conditions, there is alternate or contradictory evidence that height to weight proportion is not a direct cause or disease.

Considered Normal weight: BMI 18.5- 25
Overweight BMI 25-30.
Obesity: BMI of 30 or above

A complex interplay of factors including genetics, environment, nutrition, health care access, stress, brain function, brain chemistry and mental health factors among others, could be factors in the increase or rise of metabolic or endocrine disorders.

Health At Every Size (HAES): A newer concept defined as a way to reduce 'weight-centric' thinking and promote body positivity (Johns Hopkins University Student Well-being, accessed May 2025)[2].

Heavy Metals: Heavy metals include various forms of Arsenic (As), Lead (Pb), Cadmium (Cd) and Mercury (Hg) among others. According to Science Direct 2025[3], these can include 'transition metals (e.g. Cd, Hg, Cr), elements in the lower left part of the periodic table (e.g. Pd, Sn), and some metalloids (e.g. As)' which are often carcinogenic in nature and "adversely affect DNA, proteins, and lipids by producing free radicals that lead to severe health and environmental problems."

Data Sources

- County Health Rankings & Roadmaps (CHR&R), a program of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute | Louisiana Data

1 Science Daily. 2013."BMI not accurate enough: Obesity/mortality paradox demonstrates urgent need for more refined metabolic measures" Link to URL: https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/08/130822141948.htm

2 Rayven Nairn, MS, RDN, LDN, Feb 2023. "Health at Every Size: A concept to reduce weight-centric thinking and to promote body positivity. Johns Hopkins University Student Well-being. Link to URL: https://wellbeing.jhu.edu/blog/2023/02/20/health-at-every-size/

3 Science Direct. Heavy Metal. https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/chemistry/heavy-metal

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Vintage: The latest dataset available from LDH Tracking as of June 2025: see 'Data Measures' (varies).

Data Measures:

- Adult Obesity: Percentage of the Adult Population that reports a Body Mass Index (BMI) >= 30kg/m2 (Age-Adjusted), 2022
- Food Deserts: Percentage of the Population that has Limited Access to Healthy Foods, 2019
- Percentage of Children Enrolled in Free or Reduced Lunch, 2022-2023
- Adults reporting participating in no physical activity outside of work: Percent Physically Inactive, 2022

Health Data Explorer

The Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) Environmental Public Health Tracking Program downloaded these data from the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps (CHR&R), a program of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. The data were processed and added to the Health Data Explorer as sample data which can be viewed next to other health, environmental hazard, exposure and population health (sociodemographic or US Census Bureau) data.

To *Explore Data* on the query tool:
Step 1: Select Criteria

Category: **Population Health**

Topic: **Nutrition, Physical Activity and Weight**

Focus: Select **Weight, Nutrition** or **Physical Activity**

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Nutrition, Physical Activity, Weight and your Health

Weight that is higher than what is considered as a healthy weight for a given height is described as overweight or obese. Nearly one out of four adults in Louisiana is considered obese. Louisiana typically ranks among the top ten to fifteen states in the United States – many of which are in the south - for both adult and childhood obesity. However, Louisiana is not alone. Disease trends indicate that obesity is a national problem, contributing to poorer health, chronic disease and major causes of death.

Exercise and a healthy diet are important steps in combatting obesity. A good diet is more than just eating healthy portions of foods. It also means eating the right kinds of nutritious foods which contain essential vitamins and minerals. Together, diet and exercise play a role in the condition of obesity, but they may not fully explain it. Obesity is a complex condition which may be caused by a combination of possible exposures to natural or man-made environmental contaminants in air, water or food. Other factors include genetics, poverty, access to parks and green space, access to healthy foods, community safety, level of stress, mental health factors, access to health care, and other medical conditions such as diabetes.

Nutrition, Physical Activity and Weight and the Environment

Health At Every Size (HAES) is a newer concept which can be defined as a way to reduce 'weight-centric' thinking and to promote body positivity (Johns Hopkins University)[2]. Directly correlating body weight with disease is arguably too narrow a focus, and one that doesn't give thorough consideration to the many reasons for, or understanding of, a multitude of factors now being studied that could be contributing to weight gain, including the environment among many others.

Weight-centric approaches (with a hyper-focus on obesity, primarily attributed to health behaviors) are largely unsupported by data and current research, and present a limited, 'tunnel view' of what is likely a much more complex metabolic condition.

HAES scientifically, may contradict currently accepted thought. Advocates of an HAES approach would argue the current approach largely disregards increasing evidence of other contributors to weight gain, which may include genetics; be centered in the brain (function or chemistry); be partially due to other metabolic syndromes or disorders, or interplay with other existing conditions. Cultural differences in food and preparation, prescribed medications or arbitrary "supplements," and particularly, environmental and/or socio-demographic factors (poverty, access to healthy food and health care) remain rarely studied, or funded for study. It could be argued presently that such a narrow approach ('BMI') is biased, and worse, could be contributing to disordered eating, weight discrimination, body shaming or more harmful health behaviors.

Excessive (diet) medication (or supplements) for example, without lifestyle change, medical access, or nutrition information that could identify an array of other contributing factors to poor health could be doing more harm than good. Alternately, HAES viewpoints would advocate for widening the lens and acknowledging difficult topics and realities, such as poor nutrition, complex factors, health inequity or systemic racism built into healthcare delivery systems or research. Notably, Body Mass Index (BMI) -- a measure on which obesity indicators directly rely, is considered by some HAES advocates to be an antiquated and outdated measure itself, no longer a true, reliable or standardized indicator of metabolic health.

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Data Methods, Limitations and Important Considerations

Please refer to the County Health Rankings & Roadmaps (CHR&R), a program of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute for more information on these shared data for Louisiana ('Data Sources').

Data Re-release

This is a public dataset which can be freely shared with citation.

Additional Information

Please visit the following links for more information:

- CDC | Obesity
- US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) | Connecting people to food: A network approach to alleviating food deserts
- LDH | Bureau of Nutrition Services and Living Well-Ahead
- DCFS | SUN Bucks

Questions?

- Email: healthdata@la.gov
- Website: http://ldh.la.gov/tracking
- Toll free Phone: 1-888-293-7020