



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT
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UNDER EMBARGO Until August 30, 2022 at 12:01 a.m. ET

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Childhood Overweight and Obesity: Updated Data for Rhode Island

New Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Briefs show rates of childhood overweight and obesity have increased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic

35% of Rhode Island children ages two to 17 are either overweight or obese, compared to 31% in 2019.

Providence, Rhode Island (August 24, 2022)— Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will release its newest publications, *Childhood Overweight and Obesity: Updated Data for Rhode Island* and *Childhood Overweight and Obesity: Trends in Rhode Island*, at a virtual policy roundtable on Tuesday, August 30, 2022, from 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Featured speakers will include Stephanie Geller, Deputy Director at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT; and Carolyn Belisle, Managing Director, Corporate Social Responsibility at Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst Kaitlyn Rabb will share findings from the *Policy Brief* and offer recommendations for improving data collection and reducing childhood overweight and obesity. Reflections will be provided by Ellen Amore of the Rhode Island Department of Health, Kerri Connolly of the Rhode Island Public Health Institute, and Laurie Moïse Sears and Rachel Newman Greene of the Providence Healthy Communities Office.

Data limitations and landscape: The context of tracking childhood overweight and obesity

Despite the persistence and severity of childhood overweight and obesity, clinical data is difficult to obtain. While height, weight, and calculated BMI are some of the most frequently collected information at pediatric visits, there are very few national or state-level data sets that capture this clinical data. Most national and state-level data on childhood obesity come from self-reported survey data which can differ from clinical data.

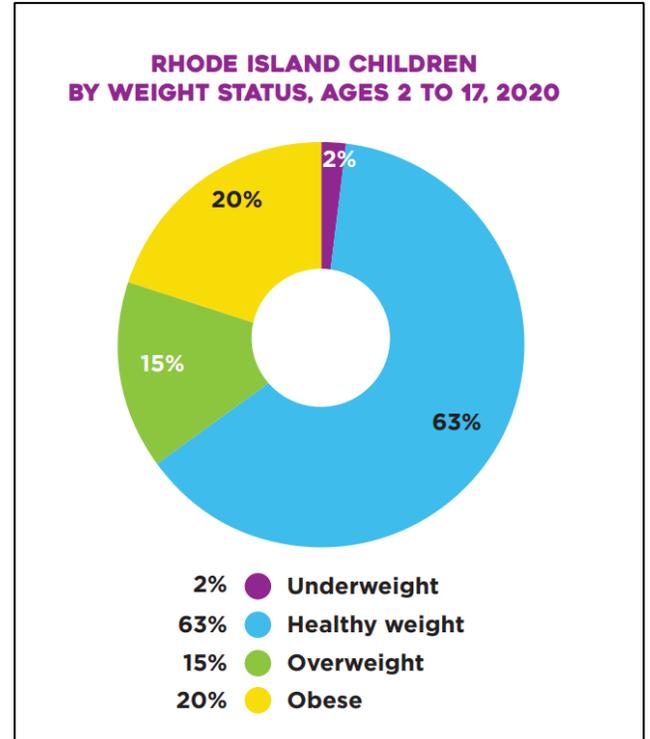
From 2016-2022 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, the Rhode Island Department of Health’s Center for Health Data and Analysis, Brown University School of Public Health, and four health insurance plans collaborated on a project to collect accurate childhood overweight and obesity data at the state and city/town level that could also be analyzed by race/ethnicity, age, gender, and health insurance status. The result of this unique collaboration was the first clinical/claims-based statewide dataset of childhood overweight and obesity in Rhode Island. **These *Policy Briefs* present updated data from 2020 collected and analyzed from 2020 to 2022 and provide the first data showing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on childhood overweight and obesity.**

Rates analyzed by gender, age, insurance status, and race/ethnicity

The data show that in Rhode Island:

- Thirty-five percent of Rhode Island children ages two to 17 are either overweight or obese, compared to 31% in 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Among Rhode Island children ages two to 17, 15% are overweight and 20% are obese. This is an increase from 2019, when 15% of children were overweight and 16% were obese.

“This new data clearly shows that we need to continue to carefully track childhood overweight and obesity,” said Kaitlyn Rabb, Policy Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “The trend was going down from 2016-2019, but since the onset of the pandemic we have seen an increase that has wiped out previous progress.”



- Disparities in childhood overweight and obesity, particularly by race/ethnicity and by insurance status:
 - Trend was going down from 2016-2019, but since onset of the pandemic we have seen an increase wiping out the progress made over prior years.
 - Twenty-five percent of Rhode Island children covered by public insurance are obese compared to 15% of children with private health insurance.
 - 41% of Hispanic and 41% of non-Hispanic Black children in Rhode Island are overweight or obese.

Community-specific information

- Data is available for each Rhode Island city and town.
- Prior to the pandemic, only five cities and towns had childhood overweight and obesity rates of 36% or more and now 11 do.
- *Please see the map on the next page for more information.*

**PREVALENCE OF OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY
IN RHODE ISLAND CHILDREN AGES 2 TO 17, 2020**

Core Cities

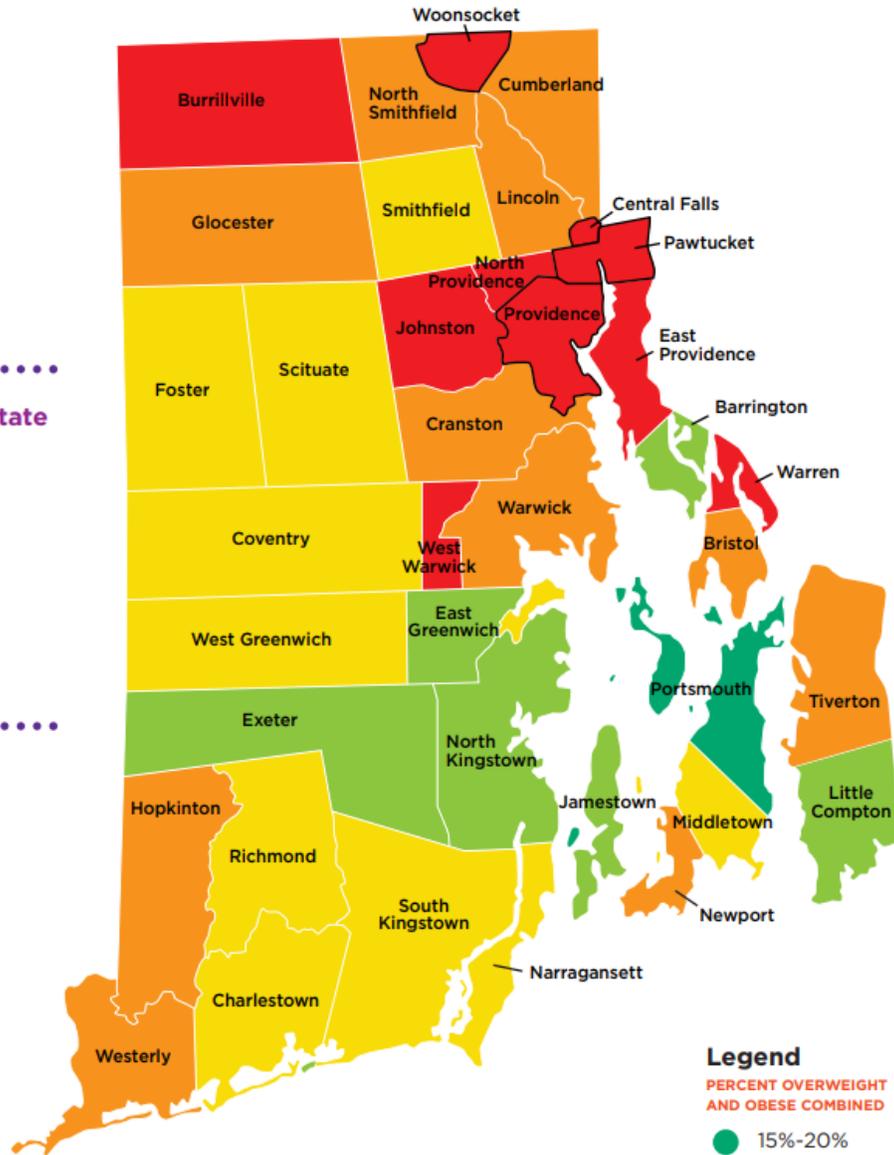
OVERWEIGHT
15%
OBESE
25%
COMBINED
40%

Remainder of State

OVERWEIGHT
15%
OBESE
17%
COMBINED
32%

Rhode Island

OVERWEIGHT
15%
OBESE
20%
COMBINED
35%



Legend

PERCENT OVERWEIGHT AND OBESE COMBINED

- 15%-20%
- 21%-25%
- 26%-30%
- 31%-35%
- 36%+
- Core City

Notes: Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

Source: Brown University School of Public Health analysis of 2020 BMI clinical and billing records of children ages two to 17 in Rhode Island from KIDSNET, Current Care, Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island, Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island, United Healthcare, and Tufts Health Plan collected by the Department of Health.



“We have seen a marked increase in childhood overweight and obesity since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Stephanie Geller, Deputy Director at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “We need to look at the root causes of this increase and the ongoing disparities in rates by race, ethnicity, and insurance status – and act to address these root causes. This includes ensuring equitable access to nutritious and affordable foods for families and increasing opportunities for safe and accessible physical activity for all children in their schools and communities. We look forward to continuing to partner on this issue, both from a data collection and policy planning perspective.”

Please see the *Policy Briefs* for a list of recommendations.

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children’s policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education, and development of Rhode Island children with a core focus on equity.