

WIC helps lower Colorado's childhood obesity rates

The percentage of overweight and obese children ages 2 to 4 participating in Colorado WIC dropped 7.4 percent from 2012 to 2015. The percentage of these children was 22.9 in 2012, compared with 21.2 in 2015.

While Colorado adults have been among the leanest in the nation for many years, the state's childhood obesity rate regularly ranks in the middle of states.

"Too many Colorado children are at risk of poor health because they are overweight," said Dr. Larry Wolk, executive director and chief medical officer of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. "Our WIC program works hard to change that by making sure low-income moms and their kids get a healthy start."

The percentage of obese 2- to 4-year-olds participating in WIC dropped from 8.4 percent in 2012 to 7.3 percent in 2015. The percentage of overweight children in the program declined from 14.5 percent to 13.9 percent over the three years.

The Colorado Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provides healthy food, nutrition education, breastfeeding support and other services to 89,000 low-income women and young children at 100 clinics statewide. Colorado WIC helps participants prepare healthier meals by providing more whole grains, fresh produce and healthy drink options. Program staff members teach new parents how to prevent childhood obesity, historically higher in families of lower socioeconomic status.

While WIC has made progress with childhood obesity, weight gain during pregnancy remains a challenge. Research shows that for mothers who gain excess weight during pregnancy and infants who gain weight rapidly, the risk of childhood obesity increases. Obese children often become obese adults and have higher risks for chronic disease, such as diabetes and heart disease.

In 2015, one-third (33.8 percent) of mothers participating in Colorado WIC gained more weight during their pregnancy than recommended by medical experts. The WIC program educates pregnant women on how to achieve appropriate weight gain, but not all women sign up for WIC early enough in their pregnancy. Women can learn more about appropriate weight gain during pregnancy at the [Institute of Medicine and National Resource Council](#).

Early childhood obesity prevention is a priority for local public health agencies and communities across Colorado. To view childhood obesity rates in your county and learn what local groups are doing, go to our [Early Childhood Obesity Prevention interactive map](#).

Since the WIC Program started in the mid-1970s, Colorado WIC clinics have accurately documented child weight and height statistics every six months until age 5. Nearly one in five Colorado children ages 2 to 4 participate in WIC. To learn more, visit the [Colorado WIC Program website](#).

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