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States Committed to Improving Childhood Obesity Rates
New revisions improve rules in licensed child care programs

AURORA, Colo. (January 3, 2024) –Childhood obesity is a public health crisis in the U.S. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports 1 in 5 children and adolescents are considered obese, and about 25% of children aged 2-5 are considered obese. There are higher rates of obesity in children from low-income families and children from Black, Native American, and Hispanic populations.

Obesity and being overweight can have negative effects on a person’s health and quality of life. Obesity often starts in early childhood, and early care and education (ECE) programs can promote the development of healthy lifestyles.

The University of Colorado College of Nursing, under the Office of Research and Scholarship, put together its annual report, [*Achieving a State of Healthy Weight \(ASHW\) 2022*](#). The study determines how regulators in 50 states and the District of Columbia support obesity prevention within licensed child care programs. It also reports the level of support across the U.S. for 47 high-impact obesity prevention standards (HIOPS). The HIOPS are supported by licensing regulations in 64% of child care centers, and more than half of large family child care homes (58%) and small family child care homes (55%).

Annual ASHW studies examine new and revised state licensing regulations, allowing child care providers to implement regulations into their daily routines. Since 2010, 46 states have adopted licensing regulations that affect the HIOPS to help prevent childhood obesity in ECE programs.

“There are more than 10.5 million licensed child care slots across the country. In these programs, children have opportunities for active play, learn healthy mealtime practices, and share daily meals and snacks. ECE programs are important environments for teaching healthy behaviors and building a foundation for healthy living,” CU CON’s ASHW Principal Investigator, Alison Pilsner, MPH, RN, CPH, IBCLC, says.

Key findings in this year’s study include:

- Georgia revised regulations to include consultations for the introduction of solid foods with both the infant’s parents and healthcare provider.
- Indiana made water freely available at child care centers, and rules for child care centers and homes are now better aligned.
- New Hampshire’s changes impacted healthy mealtime practices and prohibited the restriction of physical activity for all child care types.

- Oklahoma added new physical activity rules and screen time limits.
- Tennessee banned serving sugar-sweetened beverages.
- Wyoming’s new revisions included serving human milk in child care settings and included rules on prohibiting restricting physical activity.

While states are making progress on guidelines and revisions for child care programs, the study found that more work still needs to be done. The study suggests states can implement healthy nutrition standards and mealtime practices, increase opportunities for active play, and implement less screen time for children.

“The ASHW study has allowed us to track progress of obesity prevention practices in ECE licensing regulations over the last 13 years,” Pilsner says. “Although there has been national progress since 2010, our data confirms that states can do more to make improvements and provide a comprehensive framework that supports obesity prevention in ECE programs.”

CDC’s Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity is hosting an inaugural “ECE Coffee Chat” at 3:00 p.m. EST (1:00 p.m. MST) on Wednesday, January 10, to provide more information about the ASHW findings. The chat will be held over [Zoom: https://cdc.zoomgov.com/j/16022520817?pwd=Tk1Md1NnSUtkbDBZYXJVeWpGNWw3QT09](https://cdc.zoomgov.com/j/16022520817?pwd=Tk1Md1NnSUtkbDBZYXJVeWpGNWw3QT09) ECE agencies, organizations, programs, and other key partners are encouraged to attend.

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