



# Comprehensive Policies & Adolescent Obesity

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## RESULTS

### Introduction

Obesity is defined as an abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that presents a risk to health. Currently 42.8% of adults and 20% of adolescents are obese in the United States. The incidence of obesity is expected to increase to 70% of the United States. In addition, two-thirds of non-obese children are expected to become obese (Larsen). Childhood obesity is linked to diabetes, coronary heart disease, atherosclerosis and gout. It's safe to say that public health efforts should be directed to reduce the high rates of obesity. One important way to decrease the incidence of adolescent obesity is to implement comprehensive policies in schools. Comprehensive policies have been proven to be effective in reducing BMI, promoting healthy behaviors, and are shown to decrease the prevalence of obesogenic environments.



### Why Adolescents?

The strongest risk factor for developing adulthood obesity is childhood obesity. In fact, two-third of non-obese adolescents are expected to become obese in their lifetime. In addition, childhood obesity is linked to chronic, non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and early arthritis. Adolescents are uniquely vulnerable to developing obesity. They are more likely to make poorer decisions regarding food choices and tend to live sedentary lifestyles. Implementing holistic polices in schools can work to form healthy habits in adolescents. Children who form healthy behaviors younger, are more likely to have a healthy transition to adulthood, thus reducing the incidence of obesity.

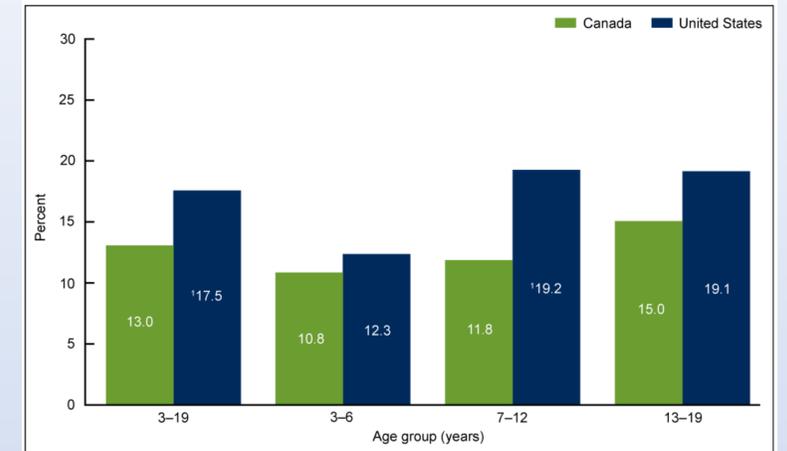
### Comprehensive Policy ?

Obesity is best understood under a biopsychosocial model. This simply means obesity is caused by biology, psychology, and socio-environmental factors. Adolescent obesity is no different. Comprehensive polices or polices that address all elements of obesity have been shown to be effective at reducing obesity. This includes standardized physical education, education on food and nutrition, and providing accessible healthy foods. Other polices include prohibiting the sale of competitive foods, such as vending machines, and school stores. Working with families, and school staff to create a healthy environment is another effective measure that encourages adolescents to make wiser choices regarding their health.

### The Importance of Schools?

Adolescents spend a significant portion of their lives in school. On average, adolescents in America spend six and a half hours in school. In addition, up to 50% of a student's calories are consumed during the school day. In fact, there is a direct correlation between the rise of obesity and the rise of food options available in schools. Implementing comprehensive policies in schools ensures students have a healthy environment which is critical for students to remain healthy.

Figure 2. Childhood obesity among children and adolescents aged 3–19, by age: Canada, 2009–2013, and United States, 2009–2012



\*Statistically significant difference compared with Canada,  $p < 0.001$ .  
 NOTE: Pregnant girls are excluded.  
 SOURCES: CDC/NCHS, National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2009–2012, and Canadian Health Measures Survey, 2009–2013.

Graph comparing adolescent obesity by age and region.

### Conclusion

The incidence of obesity continues to increase. If effective policies are not implemented, adolescents will be prone to develop obesity. Due to the biopsychosocial nature of obesity, the most effective policies are comprehensive in nature. Implementing comprehensive policies in schools, has been proven to reduce BMI, increase self-efficacy, and promote healthy behaviors. In addition, targeting adolescents can ensure children have a healthy transition into adulthood and significantly reduce the chances of attaining chronic health conditions.

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