



# FAST FACTS



## Adolescent Obesity

**OBESITY** is a complex chronic disease in which abnormal or excessive accumulation of body fat impairs health. Adult and adolescent obesity rates have more than doubled since the 1980s — in the U.S. today, obesity affects over 42% of adults and 20% of 12-19 year olds.<sup>1,2</sup> Obesity and its related complications are major drivers of rising healthcare costs, diminished health-related quality of life, and the recent decline in U.S. life expectancy. This fact sheet is part of a series designed to provide basic information about the science of obesity and current strategies to address it.

### The Prevalence of Adolescent Obesity

**The U.S. obesity rate among adolescents aged 12 to 19 years old has risen to 20%, compared to 11% in 1988-1994.<sup>2</sup>** Disparities exist based on race and geographic location.

- Among American high school students, 2019 obesity rates were:<sup>3</sup>
  - 21.3% for Native American students
  - 21.1% for Black students
  - 19.2% for Latinx students
  - 15.6% for multiple-race students
  - 13.1% for white students
  - 6.5% for Asian students
- Colorado had the lowest obesity rate for high school students at 10.3%, while Mississippi had the highest at 23.4%.<sup>3</sup>

### Adolescent Obesity Comorbidities

Adolescents with higher BMIs and more comorbidities are more likely to experience a decreased health-related quality of life.<sup>4</sup>

- Common comorbidities for obesity in adolescents include:<sup>5</sup>
  - High blood pressure
  - High cholesterol
  - Diabetes
  - Osteoarthritis and joint pain
  - Sleep apnea and breathing problems
- Adolescents with obesity may also experience psychological effects. These may include:<sup>6,7</sup>
  - Low self-esteem
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Eating disorders
  - Suicidal ideation

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Adolescent obesity has risen over the past few decades, putting adolescents at risk of serious complications.
- Adolescents deserve access to a wide range of safe and effective obesity treatments.
- Weight stigma can occur across a variety of settings and can be profoundly harmful to adolescents' health and academic success.

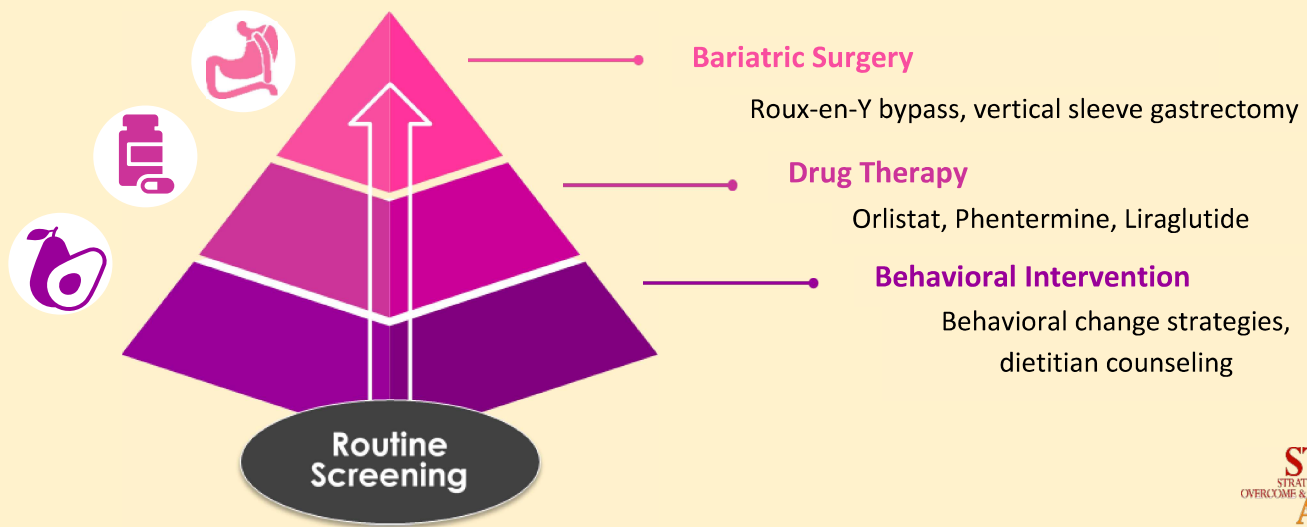
### LEARN MORE

Robert Wood Johnson  
Foundation:  
*High School Obesity Rate Maps*



## Treating Adolescent Obesity

Many of the obesity treatments available to adults are also available to adolescents. However, only **three medications** have FDA approval for use in adolescents: Orlistat and Liraglutide for patients aged 12 and older and Phentermine for patients over the age of 16.<sup>8,9</sup> **Over half** of adolescents seeking surgical interventions for obesity were initially denied insurance coverage for the procedure because they were under the age of eighteen.<sup>10</sup>



**STOP**  
STRATEGIES TO  
OVERCOME & PREVENT  
**OBESITY**  
**ALLIANCE**

## Adolescent Obesity and Weight Stigma

**Adolescents with obesity can be particularly vulnerable to experiences of weight stigma. Weight stigma can be described as “the societal devaluation of a person because he or she has overweight or obesity” and it is often based on inaccurate and harmful stereotypes.**<sup>11</sup> Stigmatizing experiences may occur at school, home, a doctor’s office or as a result of the media. Weight stigma is dangerous and may actually worsen obesity for those who experience it.<sup>11</sup>

- Adolescents who experience persistent weight stigma may be at higher risk for:<sup>11</sup>
  - Emotional and psychological effects such as poor body image, mental illness, substance use or self-harm
  - Academic outcomes such as social isolation, victimization, poor grades or skipping school
  - Disordered eating behaviors like binge-eating or emotional eating
  - Decreased exercise and physical activity behaviors

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