

Turning the tide on childhood obesity

Written by Dr. Janey Thornton, USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services
Monday, 19 August 2013 15:24



As the Department of Agriculture's Deputy Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services, I am on a mission to make sure all of our nation's children have the best possible chance at a healthy life and a bright future. So, I'm very encouraged by some recent news from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): the rate of [obesity among low-income pre-school children appears to be declining](#) for the first time in decades.

The declining rates show that our collective efforts—at the Federal, State and community level—are helping to gain ground on childhood obesity, particularly among some of the more vulnerable populations in our country. Low-income children are often at a big disadvantage when it comes to getting the food they need to grow up healthy and strong, which is why the nutrition programs and resources available through USDA are so vital.

Programs like [WIC](#)—with its new, healthier food package offerings for pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and young children, including more fruits and vegetables and more whole grains—and the [Child and Adult Care Food Program](#)—with its increasing emphasis on nutrition and physical activity for young children—are making a difference in the lives of millions of children.

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Our efforts don't stop there. School-aged children are now getting [healthier and more nutritious school meals and snacks](#),

thanks to the support of First Lady Michelle Obama's

Let's Move!

initiative and historic changes implemented under the historic Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act.

We're supporting healthy, local foods in schools through our

[Farm to School grant program](#),

and we're

[improving access to fresh produce and healthy foods](#)

for children and families that receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits.

So what can you do to make a change in your home and community? Parents and caregivers can use educational materials like [Healthy Eating for Preschoolers](#) and [Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children](#)

to help teach young children healthy habits from the start. Teachers, principals and school food service professionals can use nutrition education materials like the

[Great Garden Detective](#)

curriculum provided through Team Nutrition to motivate older children to eat healthy and try new foods. Kids can explore

[MyPlate Kids Place](#)

and take the MyPlate Pledge to commit to making healthy food choices at school and at home.

And parents, teachers, and kids alike can get active and learn about healthy foods with

[Let's Move!](#)

in school, at home and in their communities.

Don't get me wrong—we still have a long way to go before America's childhood obesity epidemic is a thing of the past. Far too many—1 out of every 8—preschoolers are still obese. Unfortunately, obesity in these early childhood years sets the perfect stage for serious health problems throughout the entire lifespan.

We at USDA are proud of our ongoing efforts to ensure the health of America's next generation, and we know that, combined with your efforts at home, we are beginning to see real results in the fight against early childhood obesity.

Dr. Janey Thornton serves as USDA's Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services Deputy Under Secretary. Before coming to USDA, Dr. Thornton served as School Nutrition Director for Hardin County Schools in Elizabethtown, Kentucky and served as president of the 55,000-member School Nutrition Association during the 2006-2007 school year. Learn more about USDA's efforts to [improve child nutrition](#) and visit [ChooseMyPlate.gov](#) for quick, easy nutrition and diet tips for families.