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Wisconsin Obesity Rate Higher than Previous Estimates

A new reports puts the state's obesity level at more than 40 percent, 10 percentage points higher than previous estimates.

By **Tala Salem**, Staff Writer June 11, 2018



New research indicates the obesity rate among Wisconsin adults is 10 percentage points higher than previously thought.  (JEFF HAYNES/AFP/GETTY IMAGES)

WISCONSIN'S POPULATION is heavier than anybody thought.

More than 40 percent of Wisconsin adults were classified as obese from 2015 through 2016, and nearly 15 percent of children were obese, according to a [new study](#).

Previous estimates indicated Wisconsin's obesity rate was close to 31 percent, but the new research from the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health reveals the rate is actually 10 percentage points higher among adults. At 41.2 percent, Wisconsin's obesity rate was slightly greater than the national average, which [according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) was 39.8 percent in adults in 2015-2016. The report from the university's Obesity Prevention Initiative found there were neighborhoods in Wisconsin where children are almost six times more likely to be obese than in other nearby neighborhoods.

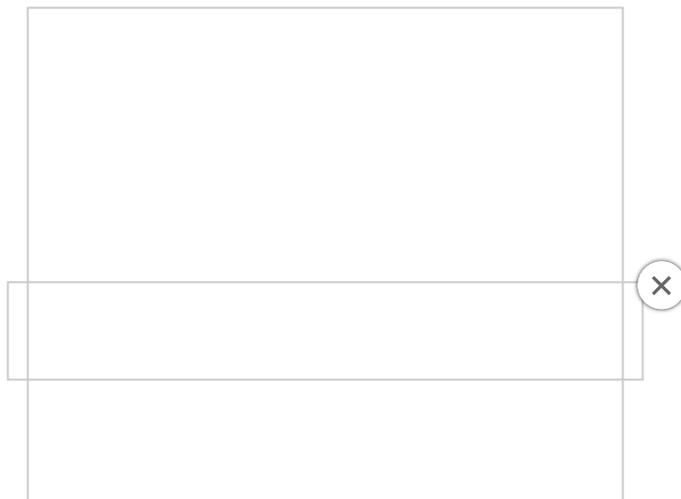
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"I didn't find the results that shocking," lead researcher Hilary Joyner says. "The 31 percent figure comes from telephone surveys, which are self-reported. But ours are from measured height and weight at the doctor's office. We know people overestimate their height and underestimate their weight, and this highlights the importance of using measurements as opposed to self-reporting."

The study shows the obesity rate varies depending on where people live within the state. Sizable differences were recorded between ZIP codes in rural areas compared with urban areas, with adults in some ZIP codes found to be four times more likely to be obese than people in other ZIP codes.

"Rural areas have higher obesity because the population tends to be older, and older populations usually have higher obesity rates," Joyner says. "Rural areas are also farther apart so people drive from place to place and there is less access to healthy foods."



The Wisconsin Health Atlas' obesity map, which is a map created as part of the initiative, is more specific than previous health maps, narrowing the data down to ZIP codes. The highest obesity rate, at around 67 percent, was in St. Nazianz, Manitowoc County, while the lowest, according to the report, was approximately 16 percent, in Madison's near west side in Dane County.

People should be cognizant of the differences in obesity rates across different communities within the state rather than the higher-than-expected obesity rates, says Sara Lindberg, who led the data team for the project.

"Those differences in ZIP codes are really important," Lindberg says. "They tell us the places where we live and work really matter in shaping our health."

The maps are part of the larger Wisconsin Health Atlas project, and a collaboration between the Obesity Prevention Initiative, the Health Innovation Program and the Wisconsin Collaborative for Healthcare Quality. The project was funded by the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health through the Wisconsin Partnership Program.

Tags: obesity, Wisconsin