



**For Immediate Release:**  
Wednesday, August 15, 2001

## NEWS RELEASE

**Contact:**  
Jana Kettering  
Public Information Officer  
801-538-6339

# Utah Department of Health Report Shows Half of Utah's Adults Are Overweight or Obese

(Salt Lake City, UT) - A new Utah Department of Health (UDOH) report shows that half of Utah's adults are now overweight or obese. The new Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) Trend Report indicates that the percentage of Utah's adults who are obese or overweight went from 35.9% in 1989 to 50.9% in 1999; this represents a 42% increase. The Utah gender breakdown shows that 40% of women and 58% of men are overweight or obese. Nationally, the statistics show the percentage of overweight and obese individuals also went up over the last ten years from 42.8% in 1989 to 56.2% in 1999.

Being overweight increases the risk of many chronic disease including heart diseases, stroke, hypertension, Type 2 diabetes, osterarthritis and some cancers. Obesity is a leading cause of preventable death in the United States. The BRFSS Trend Report uses self-reported weight and height to calculate the Body Mass Index (BMI). In 1998, the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute defined overweight for adults as a BMI of 25 or more and less than 30. Obesity for adults is defined as a BMI greater than or equal to 30. A person who is 5 feet, 7 inches tall and weighs 160 pounds qualifies as overweight, and at 190 pounds as obese.

“Obesity is a public health time bomb. Major risk factors for heart disease such as high cholesterol and high blood pressure are showing up in younger Utahns more than ever before due to the obesity epidemic,” said Ladene Larsen, Director, UDOH Bureau of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease. “We could start to see blindness, amputations and kidney failure in 30-year-olds due to the increase in Type 2 diabetes that is happening now in adolescents.”

Why are the numbers getting worse? The current epidemic doesn't reflect genetic factors, but substantial changes in the way we live our lives. We sit too much in cars and in front of TVs and computers. Many jobs don't require much physical effort. And, at the same time, we drink sugar-loaded sodas, eat high fat snack food, and super-size way too many meals — even at home. The BRFSS Trend Report found that only 25% of Utah's adults eat five servings of fruits and vegetables daily. The good news is that even small changes can translate into substantial weight loss over time. The UDOH recommends that adults, children and adolescents sit less, walk (or do any moderate physical activity) at least 30 minutes a day, eat breakfast, eat 5 servings of vegetables and fruit a day, and eat a balanced dinner at home.

- MORE -

Public health strives to improve the Utah's health by looking for ways to cut health care costs, prevent the premature onset of disease and disability, and help all Utahns achieve healthier, more productive lives. One means of addressing the nation's health care needs involves tracking and publicizing information on the status of Utah's health and our health care systems. Analyzing and publicizing our progress, or setbacks, provides a road map for individuals, communities, and professionals so they may take specific steps to ensure that health goals are being met.

This report looks at the data for the entire state by year for many health indicators. It is an opportunity to measure Utah's progress toward the Healthy People 2000 and 2010 objectives which are billed as the "Prevention Agenda for the Nation." They were developed through a national process to define a disease prevention and health promotion agenda for the nation. Included in the national objectives is the goal to "Increase the proportion of adults who engaged in regular, preferably daily, moderate physical activity for at least 30 minutes per day to at least 30 percent." The 1999 BRFSS Trend Report shows that only 27% of Utah's adults engaged in regular physical activity.

Prevention messages need to not only be targeted to adults, but also to children. Approximately 70% - 80% of overweight Utah children will become overweight adults. Metabolic changes that come with obesity in adolescence make it more difficult to lose weight as an adult. Of children aged 5 to 15 who are overweight, 61% already have one or more cardiovascular disease risk factors, and 27% have two or more. For the first time, doctors are reporting seeing Type 2 diabetes among adolescents. Currently, an estimated 15% of Utah's children are overweight or obese. **On Friday, August 17, 2001, the Health and Human Services Interim Committee will be hearing testimony to address possible legislation on regulations for vending machines in schools as well as other proposals to improve child health from 9 -11a.m. in Room 405 at the Capitol.** (Adolescent data from the 1999 Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance Survey.)

The UDOH Bureau of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease has materials and information to help adults begin living a healthier lifestyle. For more information, visit <http://www.hearthishighway.org/> or <http://www.health.state.ut.us/cfhs/he/pa/index.html>

*The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is a collaborative project of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and U.S. states and territories. The BRFSS collects uniform, state-specific data on preventive health practices and risk behaviors that are linked to chronic diseases, injuries, and preventable infectious diseases in the adult population. The BRFSS was initiated in 1984, with 15 states collecting data through monthly telephone interviews; in 1999 the Utah sample was 3,092. By 1996, all 50 States and the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Virgin Islands were participating in the BRFSS. Utah has participated in the BRFSS since 1984.*