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DATA SHOW RATES OF OBESITY FOR CHICAGO CHILDREN AT SCHOOL ENTRY FELL FROM 2003 TO 2008 WHILE STILL DOUBLE THE NATIONAL AVERAGE

Also First-Ever Data on Obesity Rates in Children Entering Sixth Grade is 1 ½ Times the National Average

Data collected by the Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children (CLOCC) indicate that obesity rates in Chicago children entering school fell significantly, from 24% to 22%. In the first-ever city-wide data for children entering 6th grade (ages 10 to 13) the obesity rate was 28%.

In 2003, CLOCC coordinated a study that found that 24% of Chicago children entering school were obese. The latest findings show that 22 % in this age group are obese, an indication of a downward trend in their obesity prevalence. (Obesity in children is measured by body mass index—a ratio of weight to height—adjusted for age and gender. Children with BMI percentiles at or above the 95th percentile are heavier than 95% of children their age and gender on standard charts.)

“These data are our first indication that the city’s efforts to stem the tide of childhood obesity for this age group is paying off,” said Dr. Adam Becker, CLOCC Executive Director. “If we assume that the number of children entering school in 2003 and in 2008 was roughly the same, a 2% drop represents about 700 less children entering school obese. Keeping our kids healthy is a community-wide endeavor. We need to keep reinforcing healthy behaviors and creating environments to support those behaviors. We need to make sure we sustain the lower rate we have achieved, and see that it falls further.”

However, the data on Chicago child obesity rates for students entering sixth grade are not as positive. They indicate an upward trend in obesity rates as children age (22% for

children entering school compared to 28% for children entering sixth grade in 2008). “This increase is not unique to Chicago. Children’s rates of obesity increase as they age,” said Dr. Becker. “This is a nation-wide problem that predicts significant health problems for affected children, problems that can follow them for life. We need to maximize opportunities for Chicago children and families to make healthy food and physical activity choices. We also need to keep advocating for policies that promote healthy living.”

Comparing national data for similar age groups indicates that Chicago’s rates remain significantly higher. The national rate of obesity for children aged 2 – 5 years old is 10.4% while Chicago’s rate for children ages 3 – 7 is 22% percent (more than twice as high). The national rate of obesity for children aged 6 – 11 years old is 19% while Chicago’s rate for children aged 10 – 13 years old is 28% (1 ½ times as high).

These findings come from data that were (like the 2003 data) collected with the cooperation of the Chicago Public Schools and the Archdiocese of Chicago, from the Child Health Examination Forms that are required for children at school entry and to enter sixth grade. A racially representative sample of schools was studied. De-identified information on height, weight, age, and gender were used to calculate weight status and BMI (body mass index). “The willingness of CPS and the Archdiocese to partner with CLOCC in this project is a sign of their commitment to understanding the scope of the problem and identifying solutions,” said Dr. Maryann Mason, Lead Investigator and CLOCC Community and Evaluation Research Director.

About CLOCC

The Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children (CLOCC) is a childhood obesity prevention program housed within the Center for Obesity Management and Prevention at Children’s Memorial Hospital. CLOCC’s mission is to confront the childhood obesity epidemic by promoting healthy and active lifestyles for children throughout the Chicago metropolitan area. Its work fosters and facilitates connections between childhood obesity prevention researchers, public health advocates and practitioners, and the children, families and communities of Chicagoland. Currently CLOCC has over 2,500 participants representing over 850 organizations. For more information, visit www.clocc.net.

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