

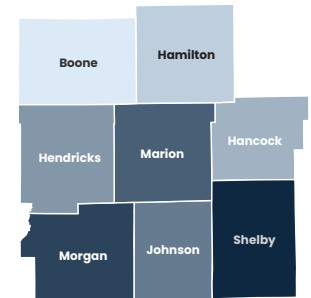
Weight Trends Among Children & Adolescents within Central Indiana

Childhood obesity has continued to rise in central Indiana, and the latest data make clear that this trend is more than a health issue—it is a challenge that touches nearly every aspect of a child’s well-being. According to the *2024 Weight Trends Among Children and Adolescents within Central Indiana: 2023 Data Addendum* report, more than 1 in 5 children between the ages 2 to 19 (22%) were living with obesity in 2023, representing an increase of 6.4 percentage points since 2014. The rate increase (5.3 percentage points) during the COVID-19 pandemic years (2020–2022) accounted for a large portion of the overall rise.¹

Nearly 40% of children in the Central Indiana Region were overweight or living with obesity in 2023—an increase of 3.8 percentage points since pre-pandemic years.²

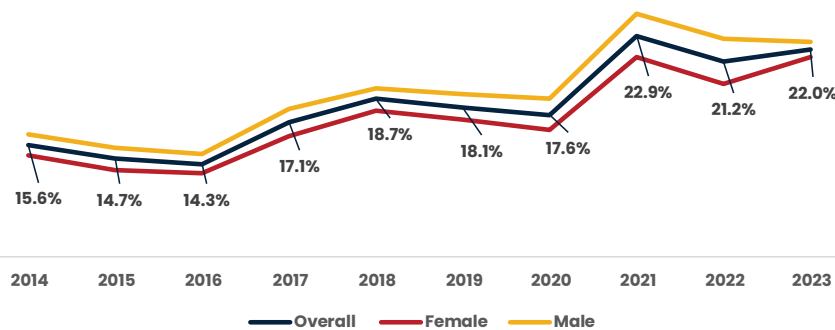
The largest increase was observed among the youngest children, ages 2 to 5, who experienced an 83% rise in obesity prevalence from 2014 to 2023, with 61% of that increase occurring during the pandemic alone. Obesity rates also rose among older children and adolescents, though at a slower pace. Although obesity rates were highest among female children (6.6%) in 2023, the most significant increase occurred among male children aged 2 to 5, whose rates rose by 95% since 2014 — with nearly 74% of that growth happening during the pandemic years. The report also highlights significant racial and ethnic disparities, with Hispanic and African American youth experiencing the largest increases in obesity prevalence (46% and 43%, respectively) highlighting racial and economic disparities that go beyond individual choices.³

Central Indiana Counties



Obesity Prevalence Among Children Age 2 to 19 Years, Central Indiana: 2014–2023

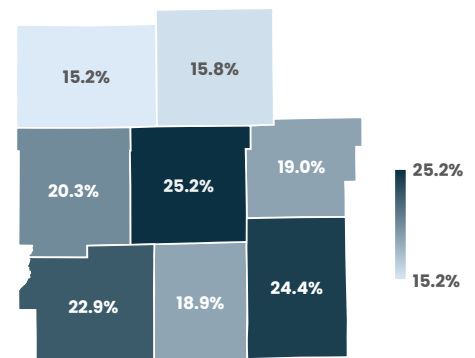
Source: 2024 *Weight Trends Among Children and Adolescents within Central Indiana: 2023 Data Addendum*



Note: Data shown above represents the overall child obesity rate. Central Indiana is defined in the report as Boone, Hamilton, Hancock, Hendricks, Johnson, Marion, Morgan, Shelby counties.

Obesity Prevalence Among Children Age 2 to 19 Years, Central Indiana: 2023

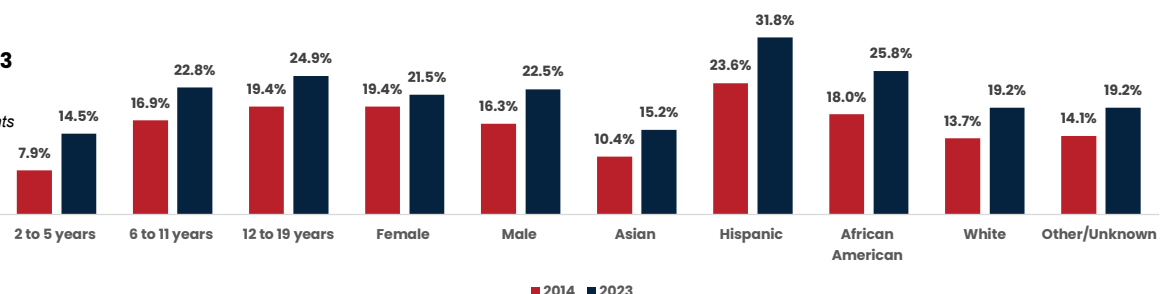
Source: 2024 *Weight Trends Among Children and Adolescents within Central Indiana: 2023 Data Addendum*



Obesity Prevalence Among Children by Subgroup, Central Indiana: 2014 vs. 2023

Source: 2024 *Weight Trends Among Children and Adolescents within Central Indiana: 2023 Data Addendum*

Note: Data shown above represents the overall child obesity rate. Central Indiana is defined in the report as Boone, Hamilton, Hancock, Hendricks, Johnson, Marion, Morgan, Shelby counties.



Obesity during childhood has immediate health consequences in addition to increasing risk for chronic disease in adulthood. Kids living with obesity are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and orthopedic problems. The *2024 Weight Trends Among Children and Adolescents within Central Indiana: 2023 Data Addendum* report highlights psychosocial effects including low self-esteem, anxiety, social isolation, and disordered eating. In school and community settings, these challenges can appear as difficulty focusing, behavior issues, and lower participation in physical activity, creating a cycle that can reinforce unhealthy patterns.

Comorbidities of Childhood Overweight and Obesity	
Cardiovascular	Hyperlipidemia, Hypertension, Vascular dysfunction, Early coronary atherosclerosis
Endocrinologic	Metabolic syndrome, Hyperinsulinemia, Insulin resistance, Prediabetes, Type 2 diabetes
Respiratory	Obstructive sleep apnea
Gastrointestinal	NASH, Cirrhosis, Liver failure
Musculoskeletal	Lower extremity arthralgias, Impaired mobility, Tibial bowing, Slipped capital femoral epiphysis
Psychosocial	Body image disturbances, low self-esteem, impaired socialization, victimization, depressive symptoms, disordered eating, anxiety
Adult Obesity	Comorbidities, diminished potential, and lower life expectancy

Source: 2024 Weight Trends Among Children and Adolescents within Central Indiana: 2023 Data Addendum

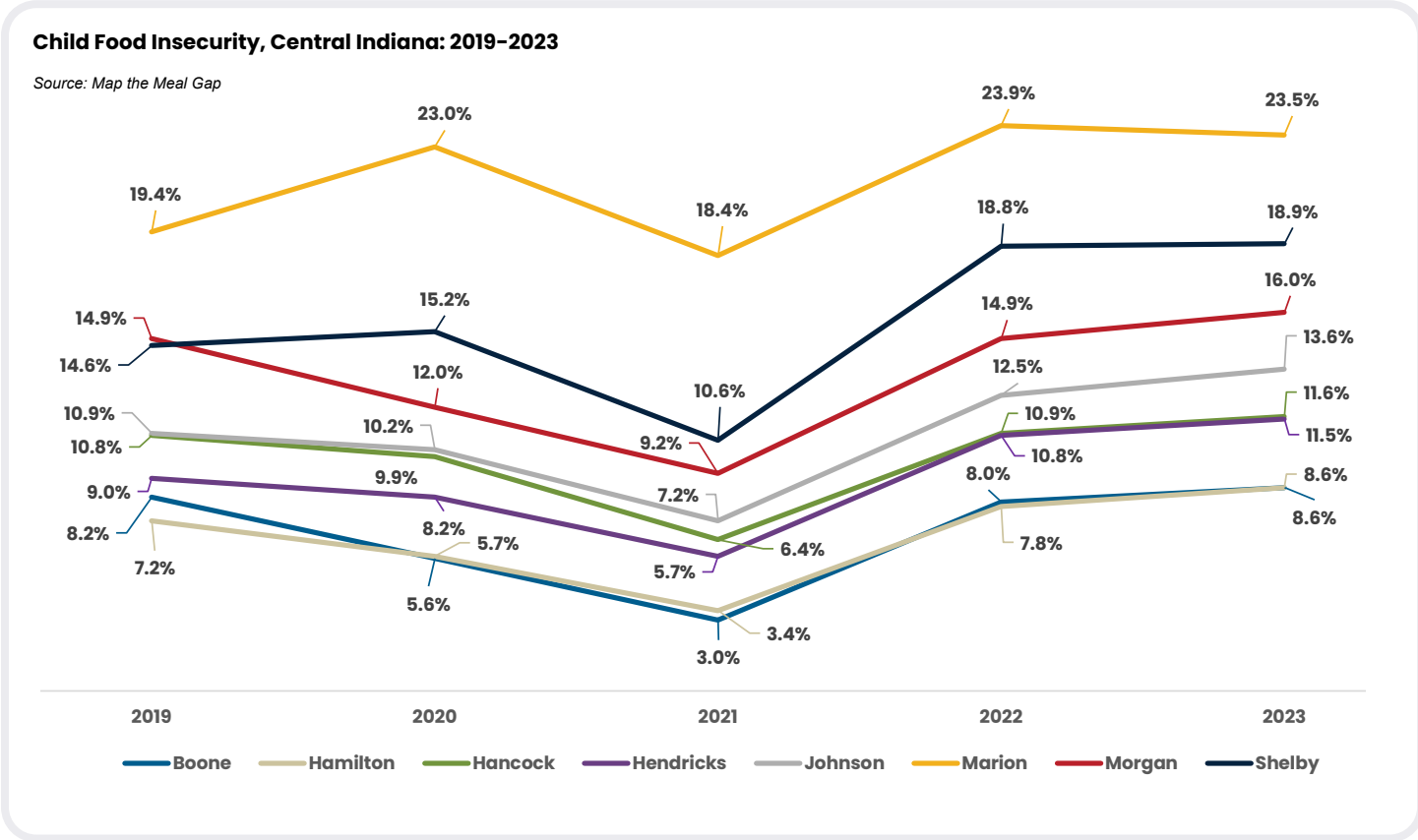


What can youth serving organizations do?

Youth serving organizations and youth workers play a vital role. By incorporating short, fun movement breaks, providing quality nutritional meals or snacks, hosting active play sessions, and encouraging positive conversations about health, they can support both the physical and mental well-being of the children they serve. These small changes also carry spillover benefits, from improved mood and attention to better behavior during programs.

Supporting children in achieving and maintaining a healthy weight is about more than preventing chronic disease, it’s about giving kids the tools for lifelong success. Beyond physical wellness, nutrition and movement are essential to cognitive development and future outcomes. The first 1,000 days of life, from birth through age two, are a critical window for brain development. Nutritional deficiencies during this period can have lasting effects on school readiness, executive function, and emotional regulation. As children grow, healthy habits continue to shape their lives. Adequate nutrition and regular physical activity support attention, memory, and academic achievement. Conversely, children who enter adolescence at a higher weight tend to “level off” at that weight, increasing their risk for adult obesity.⁴

Marion County had the 3rd highest child food insecurity rate (23.5%) in the state in 2023—4.1 percentage points higher than pre-pandemic.⁵



Malnutrition, or insufficient nutrition, often deprives children of the vitamins and minerals needed for growth and development.⁶ Youth with obesity are at higher risk of malnutrition, such as nutrient deficiencies.⁷ Factors such as income, food availability, and education can determine whether a child receives adequate nutrition. Those who do are more likely to experience better overall health, fewer long-term diseases, and lower healthcare costs.⁸

Healthy routines also have ripple effects. Well-nourished and active children are more likely to attend school regularly, stay engaged in class, and succeed academically. Over time, these small advantages compound into major life outcomes. Nationally, 3 in 4 teachers report having students who regularly come to school hungry.⁹ Students who eat a healthy breakfast at school score 17.5% higher on standardized math tests and attend 1.5 more days of school per year than those who do not, equating to 15% of the days needed to be considered chronically absent.¹⁰ These early academic gains increase the likelihood of graduating high school and boost earning potential in adulthood.

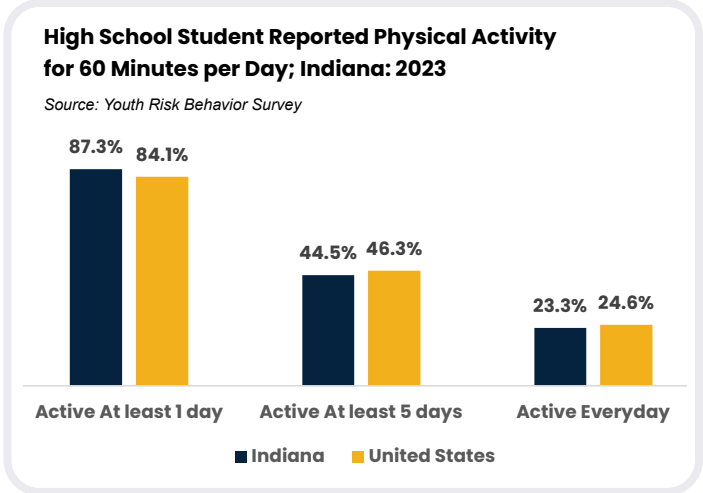
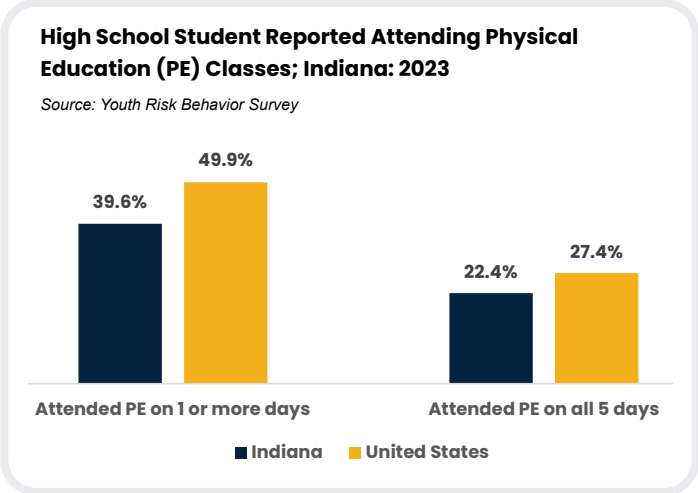
Only 23.3% of Indiana high school students reported they met the CDC recommended 60 minutes of physical activity every day of the week in 2023, falling below the national average of 24.6%.¹¹

Youth who are physically active enjoy wide-ranging benefits. Regular activity improves attention, focus, and academic performance while reducing the risk of depression. Active children also tend to have greater muscular and aerobic fitness, stronger bones, and healthier overall development compared to their less active peers.



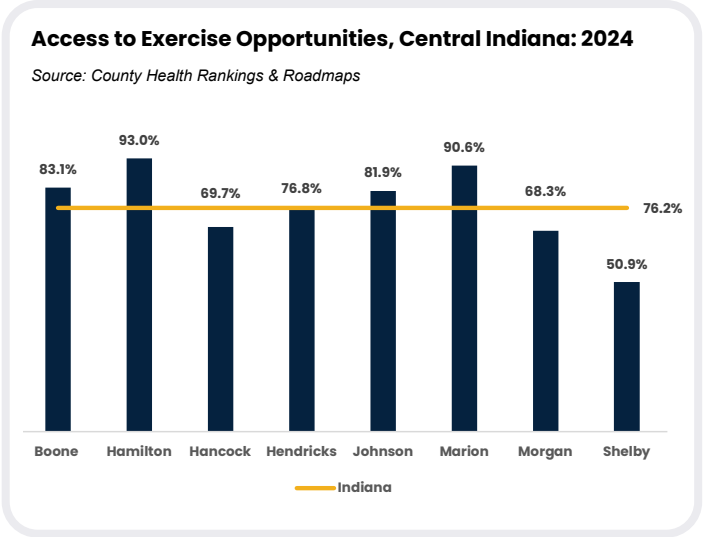
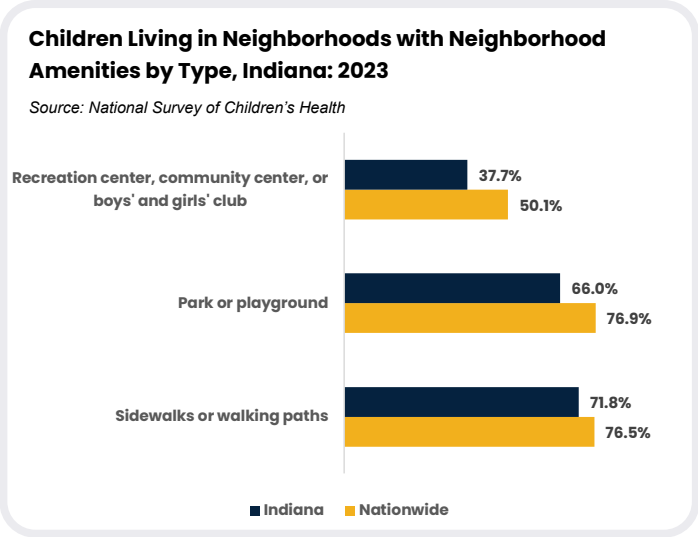
What can youth serving organizations do?

Youth workers and community programs can support early intervention by modeling active routines, offering healthy snacks, and sharing simple strategies with families, such as replacing sugary drinks with water or taking family walks after dinner. These everyday actions reinforce the building blocks of brain development and school success.



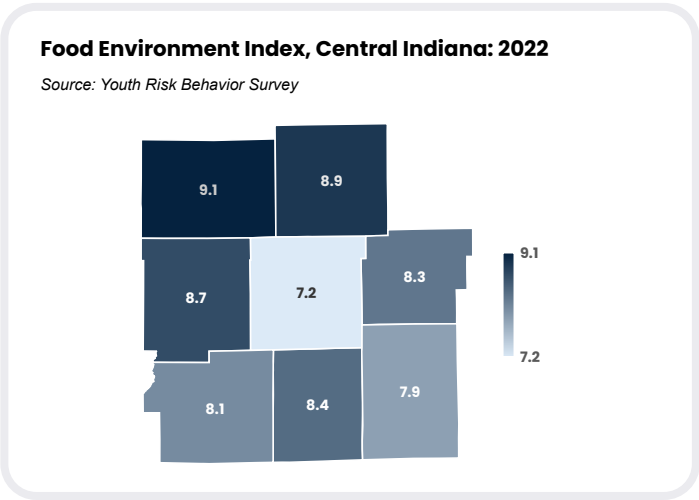
Even the most motivated families can struggle to maintain healthy routines when environmental and social determinants of health are stacked against them. The 2024 *Weight Trends Among Children and Adolescents within Central Indiana: 2023 Data Addendum* report highlights disparities by race and county, noting that Hispanic (31.8%) and African American (25.8%) children not only experienced the highest rate of obesity prevalence, but also had the largest percent increases from 2014 to 2023 (7.2 and 8 percentage points respectively). Geographic differences are also pronounced: Marion County consistently reports the highest rates (25.2%), yet counties like Shelby and Morgan saw some of the largest increases (7.3 and 7.5 percentage points, respectively).¹²

Individuals living in neighborhoods without a park or other activity facilities within a half mile of their residence are nearly twice as likely to have chronic health conditions.¹³

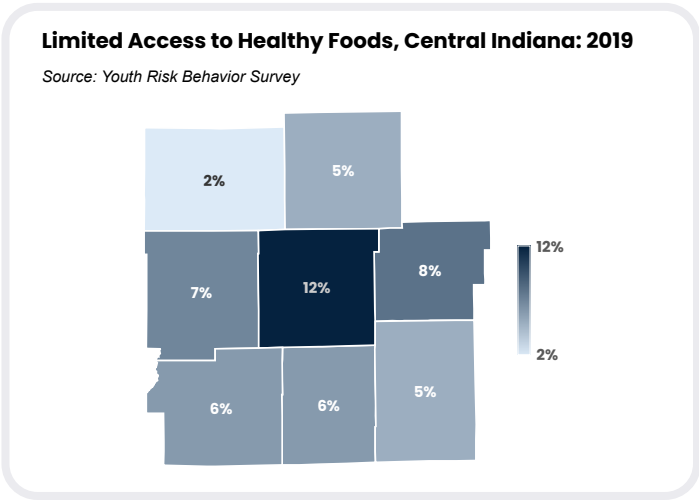


Economic barriers and proximity play a large role in regularly accessing nutritious foods. The Food Environment Index provides a more complete picture of food access in a given area by accounting for both food insecurity and overall food access. Even families and individuals who do not fall into the food insecure category may have difficulty finding fresh and nutritious food based on their proximity to a grocery store. For those families and individuals who are food insecure, proximity to grocery stores can be an exacerbating variable.¹⁴

Indiana scored 6.5 out of a possible 10 on the Food Environment Index in 2022, a decline from 6.8 the previous year and below the national score of 7.4.¹⁵

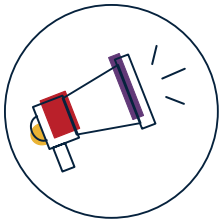


Food deserts, limited recreational spaces, and economic pressures often overwhelm families’ best intentions, making it difficult to achieve or sustain healthy weight. These trends reflect a reality where access to affordable healthy food, safe outdoor spaces, and supportive routines are uneven across communities.



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Moving Forward Together

Childhood obesity in central Indiana is both a public health challenge and a community opportunity. It impacts physical health, mental well-being, and educational outcomes but it is also preventable when families, youth workers, schools, and policymakers unite around actionable solutions. The rising rates of childhood obesity in central Indiana are alarming, but they also represent a call to action. The following are steps that could bring us closer to a future where every child in Indiana has the opportunity to grow up healthy, confident, and ready to thrive, based off the 2024 Weight Trends Among Children and Adolescents within Central Indiana: 2023 Data Addendum.

Enhanced Physical Activity Programs

- **Incorporate into Programs:** Integrate regular physical activity into daily programming, ensuring all young people have opportunities for movement, active play, or participation in sports.
- **Safe Spaces:** Partner with local parks, recreational centers, or sports leagues to provide accessible, safe, and inclusive spaces where youth can engage in structured and unstructured physical activities.

Nutrition Education and Access

- **Healthy Meals & Snacks:** Strengthen the nutritional quality of meals and snacks provided in programs by offering more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins while limiting sugary drinks and processed snacks.
- **Nutrition Awareness:** Incorporate engaging activities and campaigns that teach youth and families about healthy eating habits, emphasizing balanced diets and the long-term benefits of good nutrition.

Healthcare Interventions

- **Health Screenings Partnerships:** Collaborate with healthcare providers to connect youth with regular screenings for obesity and related health concerns during program participation or through referral systems.
- **Family Support:** Provide access to resources, workshops, and referrals that help families make healthier lifestyle choices around diet, exercise, and wellness.

Data Collection and Use

- **Tracking Progress:** Develop systems within your organizations to monitor youth participation, health outcomes, and program effectiveness. Use this data to adjust resources for youth and families, to strengthen programming related to physical health, or integrate healthier standards into organizational practices, so they become routine and have long-term impact.

Citations

1. IU Richard M Fairbanks School of Public Health, Regenstrief Institute, Jump IN (2024). [Weight Trends Among Children and Adolescents within Central Indiana: 2023 Data Addendum](#)
2. IU Richard M Fairbanks School of Public Health, Regenstrief Institute, Jump IN (2024). [Weight Trends Among Children and Adolescents within Central Indiana: 2023 Data Addendum](#)
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14. County Health Rankings & Roadmaps (2025). [Food Environment Index](#).
15. County Health Rankings & Roadmaps (2025). [Food Environment Index](#).