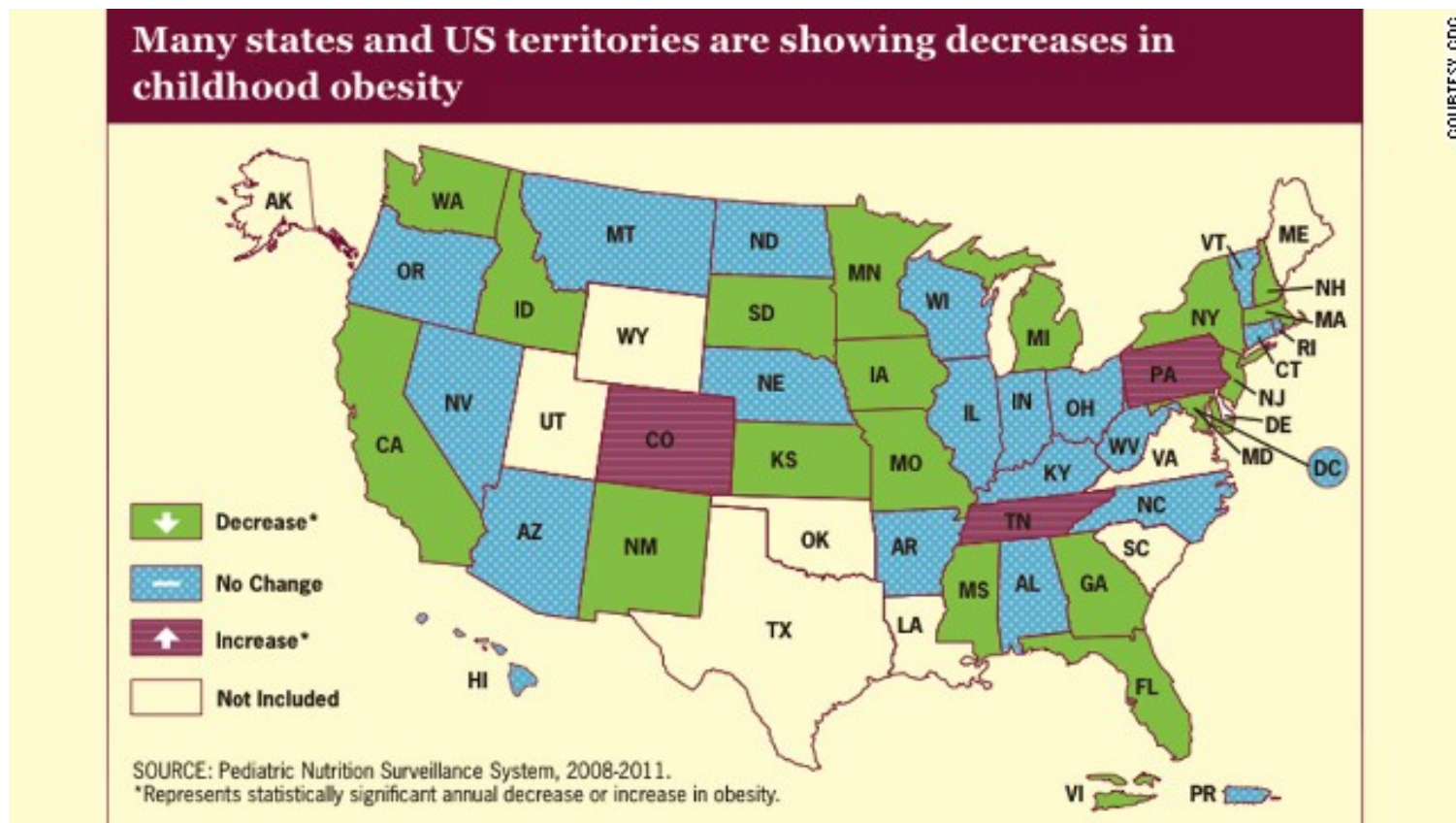


Signs of progress in childhood obesity fight



This map shows the states that experienced a decline or increase in low-income preschool obesity rates.

After decades of warnings about the rapidly rising rate of childhood obesity, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has some good news. A new report from the CDC suggests we've made some progress in the fight against childhood obesity in the nation's youngest children - specifically those from low-income families.

Researchers analyzed data from approximately 12 million children between the ages of 2 and 4 who participate in federally funded nutrition programs. Data from 40 states, Washington, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico were included in the [Vital Signs report](#).

Nineteen of the states and the U.S. Virgin Islands saw a small but significant decline in preschoolers' obesity rates between 2008 and 2011, according to the CDC. Three states - Colorado, Pennsylvania and Tennessee - saw a slight increase over the same time period, and the rest remained stagnant. Utah, Wyoming, Louisiana, Texas, Maine, Delaware, Alaska, Oklahoma, Virginia and South Carolina were not included in the report

due to inconsistencies or changes in data reporting.

"It's a bright spot for our nation's young kids, but the fight is very far from over," CDC Director Dr. Tom Frieden said.

An estimated one out of every eight preschoolers in the United States is obese, according to the CDC report. The numbers are higher in African-American and Hispanic populations, at one in five and one in six, respectively.

Children who are overweight or obese as preschoolers are five times more likely to be overweight or obese as adults, Frieden said. This can increase their risk for health problems such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes and stroke.

Government initiatives such as the first lady's Let's Move! program have tried to encourage child-care providers to offer outside play opportunities, reduce screen time and serve fresh fruit and vegetables at every meal. They've also tried to eliminate fried foods and sugary drinks from young kids' diets. While the CDC cannot prove that programs like these are making a difference, Frieden said, it's obvious that something has changed.

"Today's announcement reaffirms my belief that together, we are making a real difference in helping kids across the country get a healthier start to life," First Lady Michelle Obama said in a statement.

"We could not be more encouraged by the progress we have made, but we have a long, long way to go before we can rest and know the next generation is on a much healthier path," said Sam Kass, executive director of Let's Move! and the White House's senior policy adviser on nutrition. "We will take this moment to double down on our efforts and really see this through."

Previous smaller studies have shown similar declines in other child populations, Frieden said, but this is the largest national data system that exists. He said the CDC is confident that the declines shown in these 19 states are a sign of a national downward trend.

Obesity rates among low-income preschoolers steadily increased between 1990 and

peaked in 2007 at close to 15%. They have since flatlined. This is the first sign of a turning point.

"Obesity is a complex problem, and we know addressing it isn't going to be quick or simple," Frieden said. "It's not going to turn on a dime."