

Health Alert: Healthier Lifestyle Can Prevent or Delay Diabetes in Children

New York, August 21, 2002—Recent reports issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the government agency that promotes public health and safety, and other health organizations state that the incidence of Type 2 diabetes among Asian American and Pacific Islander adolescents and adults is rising dramatically.

According to recent research compiled by the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum (APIAHF), a national health advocacy organization, certain Asian American groups have rates of diabetes that are much higher than the non-Hispanic white population. These groups include the Asian Indian, Chinese American, Japanese American, Filipino American, Native Hawaiian, and Samoan communities.

Currently about 10 percent of the Asian Pacific American population is afflicted with diabetes and there may be more children and adults who are not yet diagnosed. Type 2 diabetes is sometimes called the “silent killer” because nearly one third of people with Type 2 diabetes don’t know they have it until they develop serious diabetes-related complications.

In addition, many immigrant communities have significantly higher rates of diabetes in the United States than are seen in their native countries. For example, diabetes rates among Chinese Americans are 5 to 7 times higher, among Filipino Americans 4-5 times higher, and among Korean Americans 3-4 times higher than diabetes rates in the native countries.

As Asian immigrants adopt more westernized eating and lifestyle habits, their rates of diabetes seem to rise. Besides being genetically predisposed to diabetes Asian immigrants in the U. S. often eat foods that are higher in animal fat and exercise less than what they were accustomed to in their native country. Asian parents can play a pivotal role in trying to prevent the onset of diabetes in their children by establishing good habits from a young age.

Diabetes, is the sixth leading cause of death in the U. S., is a disease associated with the inability of the body to produce insulin, a hormone secreted by the pancreas. Unlike the more serious, insulin-dependent Type 1 disease, which is not preventable, the occurrence of Type 2 diabetes in children and adults can be prevented, or at least delayed, with proper diet and exercise.

Type 2 diabetes is the more common type of diabetes, accounting for 90-95 percent of all incidences of diabetes cases. Until recently, the onset of Type 2 usually occurred after age 40, and there was virtually no incidence of Type 2 in children and adolescents. However, with the increasingly sedentary lifestyle and high obesity levels among youth, the incidence of Type 2 diabetes has risen at an alarming rate during the past decade.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the recent national increases have more to do with lifestyle than with genetic make-up. In fact, new studies show that modest and consistent physical activity and a healthy diet can cut a person's risk for developing Type 2 diabetes by nearly 60 percent.

Type 2 diabetes, if left undiagnosed or untreated, can lead to debilitating future complications including heart disease, blindness, kidney disease, nerve damage, and amputations.

If children or adults are overweight and or have a family history of Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes, they should get tested, because medical attention may be necessary.

To help prevent the onset of Type 2 diabetes in childhood or later in adulthood, the CDC has some simple recommendations for raising healthier children.

Eat healthier

- Provide a wide variety of foods for proper nutrition.
- Provide foods and drinks that are lower in fat and sugar.

Increase physical activity

- Help find an activity that is enjoyable—it will be easier to sustain.
- Encourage regular physical activity and limit sedentary activities, such as watching TV and playing on a computer.

Additional information is available at www.cdc.gov/diabetes.

CDC

The CDC protects people's health and safety by preventing and controlling diseases and injuries; enhances health decisions by providing credible information on critical health issues; and promotes healthy living through strong partnerships with local, national, and international organizations. Located in Atlanta, Georgia, the CDC is an agency of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Additional information was provided by the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum, San Francisco, a national advocacy organization dedicated to promoting policy, program and research efforts for the improvement of health status of all Asian American and Pacific Islander communities and also by the Joslin Diabetes Clinic, Massachusetts.

(graph follows)

Graph provided by the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum, San Francisco, California, January 2002.

