

# Obesity Rate Is Nearly 25 Percent, Group Says

By DONALD G. McNEIL Jr.

Mississippi is the nation's most overweight state, Colorado is the least, and the Southeastern states generally have more heft than the rest of the country, according to a report released yesterday by a public health advocacy group.

Obesity rates have continued to rise steadily across the nation, with the lone exception of Oregon, where they remained steady, the report by the group, the Trust for America's Health, said.

State and federal policies have done little to change that trend, the report said.

About 24.5 percent of American adults are obese, the report said, and in 12 states more than a quarter of all adults are obese, Mississippi, Alabama, West Virginia, Louisiana, Tennessee, Arkansas, Texas, Michigan, Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio and South Carolina.

The states with the smallest percentage of obese adults are Colorado, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Vermont and Montana. (One state, Hawaii, was not ranked.)

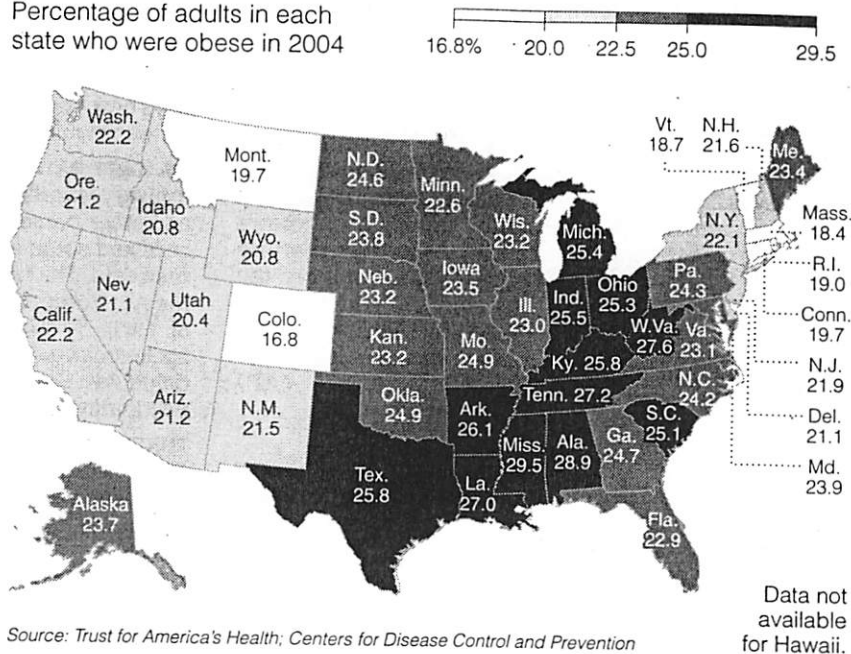
The rankings are based on public data from 2004 released earlier this year by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The information comes from telephone surveys by state health departments asking residents about health-related behavior like smoking, alcohol consumption and weight.

A spokeswoman for the C.D.C. declined to comment on the study but said her agency did not rank states by obesity levels because some states did better sampling than others. Also, although she did not say so, the agency normally takes pains not to single out individual states as the homes of the fattest residents, the heaviest drinkers, the worst drivers, the most mentally ill and so on.

Surveys by the federal agency show that there has been a sharp increase in obesity in the United States

## A Heavy Nation

Percentage of adults in each state who were obese in 2004



Source: Trust for America's Health; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Data not available for Hawaii.

The New York Times

### 'A crisis of poor nutrition and physical inactivity.'

over the last 20 years. In 1985, not a single state had more than 20 percent of its residents considered obese. Now more than 40 states do. The surveys define obesity as a body mass index more than 30. The trust's report said taxpayers paid \$39 billion in 2003 to treat conditions attributable to obesity. It noted that some states had enacted policies to encourage weight loss like banning soda and junk food in public school cafeterias or requiring more physical education in school.

The trust called for more preventive care to head off obesity, more

emphasis on nutrition by government purchasers, and designs for cities and suburbs that encouraged walking.

"We have a crisis of poor nutrition and physical inactivity in the U.S. and it's time we dealt with it," said Shelley A. Hearne, executive director of the trust. But lawmakers, she said, have reached a "state of policy paralysis in regards to obesity."

The study was in part paid for by a grant from the Dr. Robert C. Atkins Foundation, which was founded by the family of the late author of the Atkins Diet. But Laura Segal, a spokeswoman for the trust, said the foundation was separate from the company, supported research on preventing childhood obesity and had put no pressure on the trust to endorse Dr. Atkins's ideas, which attributed obesity to carbohydrates.