

One-third of US children born in 2000 at risk for diabetes

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One in three Americans born in the year 2000 will develop diabetes if current trends continue, according to a US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report.

The report, recently presented at the American Diabetes Association's 63rd Annual Scientific Sessions, estimates that the lifetime risk of developing diabetes for persons born in 2000 is 33 percent for males and 39 percent for females.

The study shows that black and Hispanic children have the greatest risk of developing the disease. Among African-Americans, 49 percent of females and 40 percent of males are likely to develop diabetes. The ratio for Hispanics is 53 percent for females and 45 percent for males, and among white children it is 31 percent and 27 percent, respectively.

"I think the fact that the diabetes epidemic has been raging has been well known to us for several years. But looking at the risk in these terms was very shocking to us," Dr. K.M. Venkat Narayan, a CDC epidemiologist and author of the study, told the Associated Press.

Dr. Narayan told the WSWS that "the main reason for such high rates of diabetes is the rapid increase in type 2 diabetes, which is being driven by the rising rates of inactivity and obesity." Seventeen million Americans, nearly 6 percent of the population, have diabetes, and over 200,000 people die each year from related complications, according to the CDC.

Diabetes, which is now the sixth leading cause of death in America, can induce heart disease, stroke, blindness, kidney failure, leg and foot amputations, pregnancy complications, and deaths related to flu and pneumonia.

"Particularly at risk are the 5.9 million Americans who are unaware that they have the disease," the CDC points out.

According to CDC estimates, diagnosed diabetes in the adult population increased 49 percent between 1990 and 2000 and is expected to rise 165 percent by 2050.

Dr. Narayan stated that these were conservative figures, and that if undiagnosed cases rose at the same rate, the 2050 estimate would be 40 million or more.

"If the CDC predictions are accurate, from 45 million to 50 million Americans could have diabetes by 2050," said Dr. Kevin McKinney, director of the adult clinical endocrinological unit at the University of Texas Medical Center in Galveston. "There is no way that the medical community could keep up with that."

Of the two main types of diabetes, type 2, formerly called adult-onset diabetes, affects 90 to 95 percent of diabetics and until recently most often appeared in people over 40 years old. Now being diagnosed among pre-pubescent children and teens, type 2 is linked to obesity and physical inactivity.

A CDC study published in January determined that obesity has risen at an "epidemic rate during the past 20 years" and a 1999-2000 survey showed that an estimated 15 percent of US children and adolescents ages 6 to 19 were overweight.

"Currently, more than 44 million Americans are considered obese by body mass index, BMI, reflecting an increase of 74 percent since 1991," stated a press release on the CDC report from the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). "During the same time frame, diabetes increased 61 percent, reflecting the strong correlation between obesity and the development of diabetes." The increases were evident regardless of sex, age, race or educational status, according to the CDC.

However, the HHS media release brought out that other studies revealed that people with less than a high school education had higher rates of both obesity and

diabetes than people with a more advanced level of education.

Said the CDC's Narayan: "Americans are becoming more overweight and get much less physical exercise. Diabetes is a very serious disease and our estimates also suggest that there is a lot of life years lost because of diabetes." He explained that a man diagnosed with the disease at age 40 will lose approximately 12 years of life and a female some 15 years of life.

Estimates show that Americans are at least as likely to get diabetes as they are to develop breast cancer, for which women have a one-in-eight lifetime risk, or heart disease, for which people at age 40 have a 30 percent risk, said Narayan.

On its web site, the World Health Organization (WHO) states: "The scale of the problem that diabetes poses to world health is still widely under-recognized. Recent estimates predict that if current trends continue the number of persons with diabetes will more than double, from 140 million to 300 million in the next 25 years. The greater proportion of the increase is likely to occur in the developing countries, which are the communities that can least afford it."



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