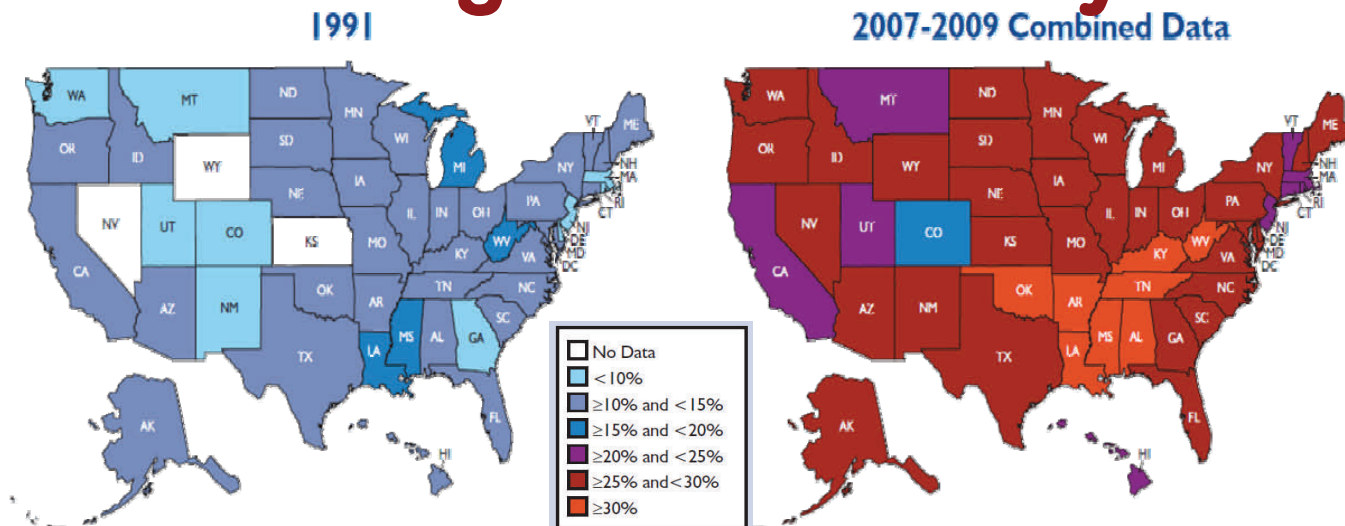


What's the Big Deal? Obesity Trends



(*BMI >30 or about 30 lbs overweight for 5'4" person)

Source Behavioral Surveillance System CDC

More than two-thirds (68%) of American adults are either overweight or obese. Meanwhile, the rates of obesity among children ages 2–19 have more than tripled since 1980. There are numerous efforts being introduced across the US to combat this trend: from promoting breastfeeding to focusing on the built environment adding trails, parks, and safe routes to schools; from implementing farm to school programs to improving the nutritional quality of school breakfast and lunch programs. But one area that has been neglected in many states that can have a great impact on school-aged children, is competitive foods.



The USDA defines competitive foods as any foods and beverages—regardless of their nutritional value—that are sold at school, but outside of the USDA school meals program. These foods are sold on à la carte lines, in school vending machines, in school stores, or through bake sales. The nutritional value of these foods is largely unregulated by the federal government and often of poor nutritional value.

The USDA further defines two categories of competitive foods: *foods of minimal nutritional value (FMNV)* and all other foods offered for individual sale. FMNV are identified as carbonated beverages, water ices, chewing gum, hard candy, jellies and gums, marshmallow candies, fondant, licorice, spun candy, and candy-coated popcorn. Current federal regulations only restrict FMNV from being sold during mealtimes in food-service areas.

Six years ago only six states had nutritional standards for competitive foods: Arkansas, California, Hawaii, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia. Today, 28 states and D.C. have nutritional standards for competitive foods. However, Montana has not yet joined the bandwagon because Montana is a local control state where-by each school sets their own wellness policies including competitive foods.

States that have strong nutrition policies in place have made the most progress in eliminating unhealthy foods from schools. Regulating competitive foods takes a group of interested parents and teachers endorsing policy change. If preventing childhood obesity is important to you, consider working with your school's wellness council or parent-teacher organization to address competitive foods.

