Local Childhood Obesity Taskforce releases Spartanburg County data.

For years, public health officials and children’s health advocates have been aware that the rising rate of obesity is a major threat for Spartanburg’s children. However, a lack of consistent local data has made it difficult to determine the exact scope of the problem here. Research released this week by the Spartanburg County Childhood Obesity Taskforce aims to make things clearer. Over the course of the 2011-2012 school year, task force members collaborated with staff in school districts 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7 to collect consistent body mass index data for every 1st, 3rd, and 5th grader. To promote consistency from school to school, staff were provided with similar scales and trained to use specific protocols to measure height and weight.

Last week, the taskforce released the following key findings to superintendents from each of the participating school districts:

- 33.4% of Spartanburg County 1st graders are obese or overweight,
- 38.0% of 3rd graders are obese or overweight,
- 39.1% of 5th graders are obese or overweight.

The taskforce also found that disparities exist among white, black, and Hispanic children and between socio-economic groups.

Kathleen Brady, a taskforce member and director of USC Upstate’s Metropolitan Studies Institute, which conducts research and assessment projects to support community and economic development in the Upstate, said access to the new data will allow Spartanburg officials and advocates to target efforts toward improving children’s health. “It will be extremely valuable as we seek resources and implement evidence based practices,” Brady said. “In addition, as we continue to monitor the BMI of the students, we will be able to evaluate our progress. This represents a substantial commitment by everyone in Spartanburg County.”

In addition to USC Upstate, the taskforce includes representatives from a number of local organizations that include Spartanburg Regional, the Mary Black Foundation, DHEC, Partners for Active Living, Hub City Farmers’ Market, and the Spartanburg County parks department among others.
“Obesity is a complex issue with significant health and fiscal implications for the entire county,” said taskforce member Renee Romberger, vice president of community health policy and strategy for Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System. “Fortunately, in Spartanburg County, health advocates recognize that addressing the obesity epidemic requires a comprehensive approach that involves a variety of supporters.”

The task force is currently working on a three-year community action plan to improve access to affordable healthy food and safe, accessible physical activity by introducing new policies and practices in schools, preschools, after-school programs, worksites, restaurants, and neighborhoods throughout the county.

Electronic copies of the report are available to the public. Please contact taskforce member Ned Barrett at nbarrett@active-livingo.org or 864-598-9638 to request a copy.

* Good for You, Spartanburg is a branding campaign created by the Spartanburg Childhood Obesity Taskforce to capture the broad-based grassroots, nonprofit, institutional, and governmental support for the development of a healthy Spartanburg County. This brand is expected to launch in the coming weeks. Businesses, schools, nonprofits, neighborhood associations, and more will be given the opportunity to become a partner in the effort.