

Diabetes cases double in county

'We need to understand why people aren't listening,' study's author says

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By CHERIE BLACK, P-I REPORTER

Twice as many people in King County are diagnosed with diabetes than a decade ago.

The numbers, released Monday in a study by Public Health -- Seattle & King County, show that 84,000 adults, or nearly 6 percent of the adult population of the county, were diagnosed with diabetes in 2006, compared with 2.8 percent in 1996. Even more are unaware they have the condition, health officials said.

The most common form of diabetes is Type 2 and can often be prevented by adopting a healthy diet and active lifestyle. But even Type 1 diabetes, for which there is no known prevention, is showing a dramatic increase here, according to health officials.

The increase represents a rare spike by chronic disease standards, health officials say, blaming in part people's attitudes toward food.

"Values haven't changed in the past 10 years, the food environment has," said Dr. Jim Krieger, a Harborview Medical Center physician and one of the authors of the study. "This is not a question of raising awareness of diabetes anymore -- we're beyond that. We need to understand why people aren't listening."

As many as 40 percent of all meals are eaten outside the home, often at fast-food restaurants, Krieger said, and the unhealthy, high-fat foods, coupled with not enough exercise, contribute to skyrocketing obesity rates. And obesity is a major risk factor for Type 2 diabetes, by far the most common form.

The study also shows racial, economic and neighborhood disparities in the number of people diagnosed countywide. For example, African Americans are 2.6 times more likely to be affected by diabetes than whites and have a death rate more than three times as high. Pacific Islanders, Asians and American Indians/Alaska Natives are also more likely to have diabetes. Southeast Seattle rates are more than four times the rate of more affluent Mercer Island.

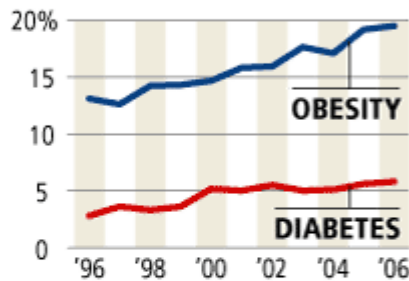


Deandra Spiller, 13, of Woodinville has her pulse checked by research assistant Lana Lee at Virginia Mason Medical Center on Monday. Deandra, recently diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes, was screened for entry into a clinical trial.

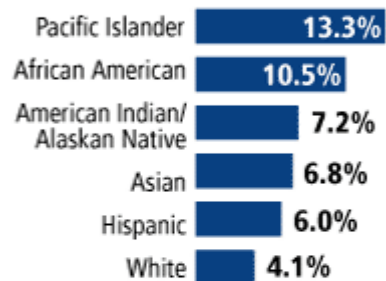
DIABETES ON THE RISE IN KING COUNTY

Diabetes rates in King County have doubled during the past 10 years. Health officials point to skyrocketing obesity rates, which is a major risk factor for diabetes. Race, ethnicity and location also play a part in who is diagnosed. Pacific Islanders and African Americans are at the highest risk, as are people living in South Seattle.

King County diabetes and obesity

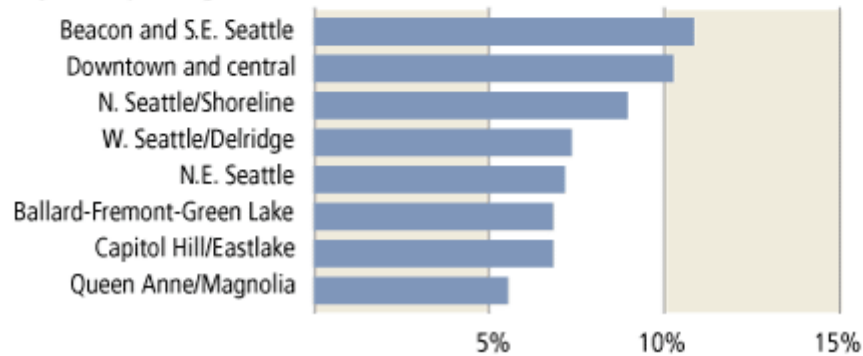


King County diabetes rates by race/ethnicity



Seattle's diabetes rates for adults over 40

By health planning areas.



Source: King County, City of Seattle

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In King County, the estimated yearly cost of health care, lost workdays, disability and other consequences of the illness is more than \$1 billion, with the majority of costs going to patient care, according to the study.

The King County age-adjusted rate of diabetes-related deaths in 2005 was 62.7 per 100,000, according to the study. That's 39 percent higher than the national goal of 45 per 100,000 by 2010 set by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Susie Davis-Powell, a diabetes educator in King and Pierce counties, said the main reason for the alarming increase in numbers is lack of education. Two of her brothers died within two years from the disease and her grandmother became blind from it, despite her teaching people about the disease every day.

"I don't see you as a patient, I see you as my family and educating you is my responsibility now," said Davis-Powell. "It's a choice to either control diabetes or have it control you."

She teaches patients how to better manage their diets and exercise habits, which can help prevent the onset of diabetes. Patients with a family history or with risk factors such as high blood pressure are screened.

"Sometimes we go back two or three years in their health history and see they should have been screened a long time ago, and could have prevented this," she said.

Although most of the focus usually is on the more common Type 2 diabetes, Type 1, commonly known as juvenile diabetes, also is experiencing a dramatic increase. Researchers at Benaroya Research Institute at Virginia Mason Medical Center, who are conducting clinical trials hoping to delay its onset or better manage the disease once diagnosed, say Seattle has one of the highest rates of Type 1 diabetes in children under 5, and they don't know why. But early research shows that oral insulin in family members of those already diagnosed showed a 4 1/2-year delay in the onset of the disease.

For Ron Spiller, research and ongoing studies give his daughter Deandra, 13, who was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes in early April, a better chance at living a good life.

"These aren't cures, but we will be able to manage things better," said Spiller, who drove to Virginia Mason from Woodinville Monday to have his daughter screened for a clinical trial.

"If kids my daughter's age get diabetes, it will be an inconvenience, but now they can manage it and lead healthy, active lives," he said.

Krieger said the key to managing and preventing diabetes from getting worse is to move beyond just telling people to eat better and exercise more. He said cities need to be designed with sidewalks and accessible bike paths. People should promote farmers markets and have access to more affordable healthy food.

"The diabetes rate is a reflection of the type of communities we live in," he said. "This is requiring us to think about the places we live in and how we eat and how we want to redesign our lives."

DIABETES FACTS

Type 2 diabetes is the most common form of diabetes, accounting for 90 percent of all cases. In Type 2 diabetes, either the body does not produce enough insulin or the cells ignore the insulin. If left untreated, the disease can lead to blindness, circulation problems and amputation.

Physicians say Type 2 diabetes can be prevented by healthy eating, exercise and managing weight. If there is a family history of diabetes, being screened to manage high blood pressure and weight gain can help prevent its onset.

Type 1 diabetes is usually diagnosed in children and young adults and was previously known as juvenile diabetes. In Type 1 diabetes, which accounts for 10 percent of all cases, the body does not produce insulin, a hormone needed to convert sugar, starches and other food into energy. There is no way to prevent Type 1 diabetes.