

Idaho Spokesman Review, Saturday, Nov. 1, 2008 – by John Stucke (2 pages)

## Diabetes rates soar in Idaho

The number of Idahoans diagnosed with diabetes has tripled in the past decade, outpacing soaring rates of the disease in other states.

The numbers are part of a national diabetes study released this week by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. They are especially disturbing to health officials in a state with high numbers of uninsured, feeble funding for education and prevention efforts, and outdated data collection practices that rely on surveys reaching only residents who have landline phones and who are willing to admit they suffer from a disease closely linked to obesity.

"It's very concerning," said Mimi Hartman-Cunningham, diabetes control and prevention program manager for the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. The state had a 216 percent increase in diabetes cases during the past 10 years, compared with an 87 percent increase in Washington.

"I've talked to three of our analysts, and we're all at a loss of why Idaho is standing out," Hartman-Cunningham said.

Records show 63 percent of Idahoans are overweight. About 8 percent, or 86,000 of the state's adults, are diabetic, the state says. Idaho doesn't track childhood diabetes. With diabetes rates growing nationally, health officials are especially worried about what they say is a tidal wave of new cases and costs facing government and private insurers and hospitals.

Diabetes can cause health problems including heart disease, kidney disease, vision loss and poor circulation that can necessitate limb amputations. In Washington state, 30 percent of adults are considered "pre-diabetic," meaning they have a fasting glucose level between 100 and 125. An additional 8 percent are diabetic.

If the large group of pre-diabetics "aren't helped and they become diabetic, it will have a grave impact on the health care system," said Jennifer Polello, health education manager at Inland Northwest Health Services, of Spokane.

In Idaho, the state asks an extra question during telephone surveys to calculate pre-diabetes levels among residents, said Hartman-Cunningham, of the Idaho health department.

"We ask, 'Have you been told that you are pre-diabetic?'" Hartman-Cunningham said. "That's how we come up with our numbers." Those numbers are far below the new national estimates.

Idaho operates diabetes programs under the assumption that pre-diabetes numbers stand at 56,000, about 3 percent of the adult population. Washington estimates 30 percent of its adult population is pre-diabetic. The money used to combat diabetes in Idaho is lagging, too. The CDC provided \$371,000 in federal funds to pay for the state's diabetes program. Idaho contributed no funds of its own; its program has the equivalent of 1.75 full-time employees.

Emily Simmitt, an Idaho health department spokeswoman, said the state's program works closely with insurers, hospitals, health districts and other providers on diabetes education and prevention.

Linda Karlgaard, a nurse educator for the Panhandle Health District, named several factors driving the rise in diabetes: More residents are aware of the link between diabetes and obesity, and are seeking treatment; the glucose level that's considered diabetic has changed in the past decade; and the state's population has grown. Spokane numbers are in line with national statistics.

About 7.6 percent of adults are diabetic. That's 25,226 people, according to numbers from the Spokane Regional Health District. "Across the board, this is of real concern," said Marcelle Thurston, diabetes prevention and control program manager for the Washington Department of Health.