

N.C.'s grade on obesity, exercise: D

BY SARAH AVERY

sarah.avery@newsobserver.com

Obesity rates are rising faster in North Carolina than nationally, and physical activity lags, giving the state a D in those subjects on its annual health report card.

But there is progress, according to N.C. Prevention Partners, which has been grading the state on its health habits since 1998.

The state improved to a C+ from a C on its tobacco use. That score could soon rise to a B as a result of actions taken this year by the state legislature, which passed a law to ban smoking in bars and restaurants.

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"The tobacco story has some good things," said Meg Molloy, president of N.C. Prevention Partners.

She said recent efforts by hospitals throughout the state to ban smoking have also been a major plus and could serve as a model for other businesses.

Additional findings:

■ 1.5 million N.C. adults, or 23 percent, smoke cigarettes.

■ 65 percent of adults in North Carolina are overweight or obese, compared to 63 percent nationally.

■ Youth obesity rates are the fifth worst in the nation.

■ Only 44 percent of adults in the state get enough exercise.

■ On average, North Carolinians die two years earlier than people elsewhere in the nation.

"It's become too easy for people to be unhealthy," Molloy said. "Cigarettes and calories are cheap."

As a result, she said, it's important for organizations to work for policy changes, such as the smoking ban and changing unhealthy food options in hospitals and schools.