



Youth Obesity Newsletter

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February 13, 2006

1.) National League of Cities Updates:

***Municipal Childhood Obesity Forums**

In Connecticut and California, city and state leaders are focusing increasing attention on the need to promote physical activity, improved nutrition, and healthy lifestyles for children. With support from NLC's Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute) made possible by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, a series of meetings with city, county, and school officials will be held on the topic in California and Connecticut during 2006. The goal of these forums is to elicit feedback from communities and raise awareness of the potential strategies municipal leaders can utilize to reduce youth obesity in their communities.

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities will hold Connecticut's forums March 16 (Norwich), April 7 (East Hartford), and May 18 (Danbury).

California's Cities, Counties & Schools Partnership will host forums February 9 (Los Angeles), February 23 (Vallejo/Solano County), and March 30 (Marysville/Yuba City). At least two other locations will be announced soon.

For more information on the forums, please contact:

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California, Cities, Counties & Schools Partnership: ccspartnership@counties.org, (916) 323-6011

Ron Thomas: Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, RTHOMAS@CCM-CT.ORG, (203) 498-3000

2.) National Program Initiative: We Can!

We Can! stands for Ways to Enhance Children's Activity & Nutrition. **We Can!** is a national education program that offers parents and families tips and fun activities to encourage healthy eating, increase physical activity, and reduce sedentary or screen time. It also offers community groups and health professionals exciting resources to implement programs and fun activities for parents and youth in communities around the country.

Four of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) came together to create **We Can!**, led by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) in collaboration with the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and the National Cancer Institute (NCI). **We Can!** provides communities with science-based resources that can help to educate youth and their parents and caregivers. These resources are supplemented by a national media campaign and the efforts of numerous national partners working to promote **We Can!**. Communities are also provided with easy-to-use tools to promote their programs and collaborate with local partners.

NIH has designed **We Can!** so that any city or town, working in partnership with local civic groups, parent groups, church/religious congregations, and other community based organizations can implement these activities in their communities. Local sites can include parks and recreation departments, afterschool programs, state and county health departments, and local coalitions of medical practitioners and city planning groups.

One of the main requirements for joining **We Can!** is to implement at least one **We Can!** youth curriculum. There are three different curricula for youth:

- *CATCH Kid's Club*, a physical activity and nutrition education program for elementary school-aged children (grades K-5) in afterschool and summer care settings.
- *Media-Smart Youth: Eat, Think, and Be Active!*, a 10-lesson curriculum that focuses on helping young people ages 11 to 13 understand the connections between media and health.
- *Student Media Awareness to Reduce Television (S.M.A.R.T.)*, a 3rd or 4th grade classroom curriculum designed to motivate children to reduce time spent watching television and playing video games.

Other major requirements include hosting at least one **We Can!** community-outreach event (such as a community health fair) and implementing the **We Can!** parent curriculum in at least one setting.

For more information about how to become involved with **We Can!**, visit: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/index.htm You can also email nhlbiinfo@nhlbi.nih.gov, call 301-592-8573, or you can call 1-866-35-WECAN.

3.) News and Research Updates:

*** Lawsuit to Challenge High School Soda Sales**

A group of lawyers that successfully sued tobacco companies in 1998 is close to filing a class-action lawsuit against soft-drink makers for selling sugared sodas in schools. For almost two years, the lawyers have been developing a case against the soft-drink industry, claiming that it leads to the obesity epidemic. In the Washington Post, lead attorney Richard A. Daynard said, "The idea is to get soda machines out of schools because they are clearly making a substantial contribution to the obesity epidemic." Daynard, an associate dean at Northeastern University School of Law in Boston, is president of the Tobacco Control Resource Center, and also chairman of the Tobacco Products Liability Project. Both organizations gave legal support to attorneys suing tobacco companies. The suit will be filed in Massachusetts, possibly being the first of many state lawsuits.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/12/01/AR2005120101467.html>

*** Food and Beverage Marketing Questioned by Institute of Medicine**

A new study by the Institute of Medicine offers new information about food and beverage marketing to children. Each year, more than \$10 billion is spent to market both food and beverages to children under 12. The study found "strong evidence" that such intense marketing leads child to request and consume high-calorie, low-nutrient products and a high percentage of advertising dollars are spent promoting foods and beverages that are "high in calories and low in nutrients" and "sharply out of balance with healthful diets." The report called for the industry to voluntarily change its marketing within two years. If this is not accomplished, the report recommends that Congress enact legislation to require advertising during children's television programs to focus more on healthful foods and beverages.

www.iom.edu/CMS/3788/21939/31330.aspx

*** FRAC Update**

The weekly Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) News Digest highlights what's new on hunger, nutrition and poverty issues at FRAC, at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, around the network of national, state and local anti-poverty and anti-hunger organizations, and in the media:

- **Food Used by Schools as Incentive or Reward Adds to Students' Waistlines, Study Finds**

Authors of a new study interviewed school administrators about school food policies and practices used in school fundraising and in the classroom as incentives and rewards and collected self-reported data from 3,088 eighth-grade students about their heights and weights in 16 middle schools in the Minneapolis-St Paul metropolitan area. The study found that the most common food practices were the use of food as incentives and rewards (69 percent of schools) and for in-classroom fundraising (56 percent). Students' body mass index increased 10 percent for every additional food-related practice allowed in their school. "Schoolwide

food practices that supported frequent snacking and the consumption of foods and beverages high in calories and low in nutrients by students throughout the school day were common and adversely associated with body mass index. . . Prevention of overweight in childhood must include attention to the nutrition integrity of schools, and school nutrition policies that consistently support and promote healthy dietary practices among young adolescents are urgently needed,” concluded the authors. The study can be found in: “*Schoolwide Food Practices Are Associated With Body Mass Index in Middle School Students*,” published in the *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* (Vol. 159, No. 12, December 2005).
<http://archpedi.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/short/159/12/1111>

To subscribe to the FRAC News Digest, visit:
www.frac.org/html/publications/pub_index.html

- **Young Children in Cities with Expensive Fruits and Vegetables Gain Significant Excessive Weight, ERS Study Finds**

A new study by the Economic Research Service found an association between characteristics of the local food supply (such as affordability of fresh fruits and vegetables and the density of food markets and restaurants) and children's diet and weight gain. Children from metropolitan areas where fruits and vegetables were relatively expensive gained significantly more weight than children from the areas where these foods were cheaper. In Mobile, Ala., the city with the highest price for fresh produce, children gained about 0.21 BMI [Body Mass Index] units more excess weight than similar children nationwide. These findings are consistent with previous research of adults that showed increased fruit consumption is linked to a lower body mass index. (“Metropolitan Area Food Prices and Children’s Weight Gain,” ers.usda.gov, September 2005)
www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/CCR14/

4.) Other Resources:

***National Conference of State Legislators Legisbrief on Physical Activity now available:**

The National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL) recently published a new Legisbrief on “Physical Education and Physical Activity for Children and Teens” that is sent to state legislators. The brief points out that P.E. classes with moderate to vigorous physical activity “improved physical fitness across diverse racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups; among both boys and girls at all grade levels; and in urban and rural settings.”

Also available is NCSL State Legislature’s magazine article “What’s for Lunch, When’s Recess?” that was published December 2005 on school nutrition and physical activity. Both publications can be accessed on the YEF Institute’s website in the Publications section of the Childhood Obesity program page.

***International City Managers Association Webcast**

ICMA will be hosting the webcast, *Improving Nutrition and Reducing Obesity: Local Government Strategies* on March 2, 2006, 2:00-3:30 p.m. EST. This 90-minute webcast will provide strategic, practical tools communities can use to develop policies and implement practices that reduce obesity by improving access to nutritious food. The webcast will feature Mark Winne, a food policy expert who has extensive experience working with communities, including the City of Hartford, Conn., Rosemarie Cordello with the Portland/Multnomah County Food Policy Council as well as representatives from other jurisdictions that have successfully applied these techniques.

This webcast *is free to the first 100 registrants* after which the cost will be \$95 per site. For more information and to register, visit: <http://lgean.org/html/training>. Information is also available toll-free at 877-865-4326.

This newsletter was sent to you by the National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, & Families. For more information, please contact Keshia Crosby at 202-626-3074 or crosby@nlc.org.