

SCC Health Offers Guidance Against Childhood Obesity

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St. Charles County, Missouri – A recent report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention noted a decrease in obesity rates among low-income preschoolers in many states (including Missouri) but also stated that about 1-in-8 kids that age are obese (www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/childhoodobesity). Although encouraging, this report is troublesome in that children who are overweight or obese as preschoolers are about 5 times as likely as normal-weight children to become overweight or obese adults.

Obesity at any age can lead to physical, mental and economic issues throughout a person's life. Doctors widely recognize that obesity is a contributing factor in the development of heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, some cancers, high blood pressure, stroke and some breathing or sleeping conditions. Obese children are at higher risk for experiencing social or psychological effects like bullying, discrimination and low self-esteem. In addition, a CDC study reported that medical care costs involving obesity-related treatments were about \$147 billion and that medical spending for obese individuals was more than \$1,400 higher than that of those determined to be at normal weight.

A collective, nationwide effort is underway to combat childhood obesity, but individual families must do their part. A first step is to improve eating habits and reduce the intake of sugary foods. A second step is to become more active, with studies showing that children require moderate physical activity each day to strengthen bones and muscles. A third focus is to decrease the number of hours a child watches television or uses a computer for video games. The last step is to make these lifestyle changes incorporating healthier behaviors and increased activity a regular part of a family's behavior.

As proper nutrition and sufficient physical activity play a vital role in maintaining health and proper weight, the St. Charles County Department of Community Health and the Environment offers several programs that guide individuals and families in ways to control obesity. The Health Education program presents many instructional classes and hands-one trainings for children and adults. To arrange a nutrition promotion class for your school, organization or business, please call the Health Education program at (636) 949-7400. In addition, the department's website <http://health.sccmo.org> presents a variety of resources to help individuals make healthy decisions, including simple and delicious recipes, tips for eating well while dining out, links to other helpful websites and much more.

To further aid families in this battle against the health risks and social implications of obesity, the St. Charles County Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC) provides nutritional counseling, health screening and specific supplemental foods at no cost to qualifying families. The program tailors education and foods for the individual (as women and children of different ages have varied nutritional needs) and selects food items that are low in sugar, saturated fat and cholesterol, and are good sources of vitamins A, C, and D; calcium; iron; protein; and fiber. In addition, the program provides support to new mothers and infants to enhance the practice of

breastfeeding, which studies show provides the ideal nutritional composition for a baby's development, prevents many infections and lowers the risk for childhood obesity.

A program within the Division of Public Health, the St. Charles County WIC Program is located at 1650 Boone's Lick Road in St. Charles. Persons interested in applying for WIC services in St. Charles County, or in need of more information, should make an appointment by phone at 636.949.7402 during work hours (8:30 a.m. to noon or 1 to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday – except holidays). Participants in the program must meet income guidelines, a residency requirement and be individually determined to be at "nutrition risk" by a health professional.

In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, the St. Charles County Department of Community Health and the Environment is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington DC, 20250-9410 or call 866.632.9992 (voice) or 800.877.8339 (TTY). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

The St. Charles County Department of Community Health and the Environment is committed to the protection and enhancement of health and the quality of life for all members of our community. Through three divisions — Public Health, Environmental Public Health and Protection, and Humane Services — the department coordinates with federal, state, and local organizations to provide a wide range of services that have a profound impact on the lives of St. Charles County's residents and visitors. To discover ways that the department assists this region or to learn about volunteer opportunities with any of the divisions, please visit <http://health.sccmo.org> or call 636.949.7400.

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