



Shape Up Somerville: A Community-based Obesity Prevention Campaign for Culturally Diverse Children

Issue

Obesity has become the most common nutritional disorder in the United States, and the prevalence is increasing among children. Poor nutrition and insufficient daily physical activity are among the primary causes of obesity. Few engage in daily activity that is sufficient to build or maintain physical fitness. In addition, many children consume diets that are low in nutritional value and high in fat and calories.

A variety of educational approaches have been tried to prevent obesity among high-risk individuals, but alone, they have been largely unsuccessful. In contrast, approaches that attempt to modify the environment in which decisions are made about diet and activity appear promising. Among young children, schools and childcare settings are likely places to implement environmental changes for obesity prevention.

“It is alarming that obesity rates among children and adolescents in the U.S. have doubled in the past 20 years. Today, our children are at greater risk than in previous years of developing chronic illnesses such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.”

Tommy G. Thompson
Former Secretary, Health and Human Services

Response

Researchers at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University are collaborating with parents, teachers, school officials, and community members to promote an obesity prevention campaign. The campaign will be designed to encourage schools, childcare programs, businesses, and families to make environmental changes that reinforce healthful eating and physical activity. Examples of environmental changes that may be initiated as part of the campaign include creating a “safe routes to school initiative”, increasing fruit and vegetable availability in school cafeterias, training teachers and after school program leaders on a healthy eating and physical activity curriculum, training pediatricians and school nurses, working with restaurants to change portion size and fruit and vegetable options for children, and appearing on community cable shows.

The specific aims of the project include the following:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of a community-based obesity prevention program (Shape Up Somerville: Eat Smart. Play Hard);
- Offer numerous options for physical activity; and
- Improve the nutritional value of foods offered daily to children.

This project will provide useful information about strategies for partnering with community organizations to change the environments that influence children’s diets and physical activity levels.

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More Information

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For more information about CDC’s Community-based Participatory Prevention Research, please contact the Office of Public Health Research, CDC, 1600 Clifton Rd., MS D-72 Atlanta, GA 30333
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