

**LISTENING TO THE CDC  
WHO ARE THEY, WHAT DO THEY DO, AND WHAT'S  
VERB™ PONTE LAS PILAS™ GOT TO DO WITH IT?**

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Important statistics about health and medical conditions affecting the U.S. population are collected, tracked, and distributed to the public by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a division of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Recent examples covered in the media include news about the West Nile virus, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), and, of particular note – childhood obesity - which is an alarming health trend, especially among Hispanic/Latino youth living in the U.S. Obesity is related to health conditions such as type 2 diabetes, elevated blood cholesterol, and blood pressure are negatively affecting the health and well-being of children.<sup>1</sup>

Established in 1946, the CDC is one of the key operating divisions of HHS, providing a system of health surveillance to monitor and prevent disease outbreaks (including bioterrorism), implement disease prevention strategies, and maintain national health statistics. The CDC also:

- 1) manages immunization and workplace safety programs;
- 2) works with other national and international agencies to prevent environmental diseases and guard against international disease transmission; and
- 3) works with various health partners and local community organizations from across the nation to develop and advocate sound public health policies, promote healthy behaviors, and bring up-to-date resources to the public to enhance positive health decisions made every day.

***Warning Against Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes Epidemics***

Consistent with its mandate to keep the public informed, the CDC is raising awareness about the impact of today's technology-enhanced, sedentary lifestyles on the alarming growth of obesity among Hispanic youth. According to the CDC, since 1980, the number of tweens who are overweight has more than doubled.

Research shows that an array of entertainment options, such as TV, VCR, video games, and computers, are keeping tweens sedentary. In fact, the average Hispanic child spends more than 4 hours in front of a screen each day, substituting screen entertainment for time that used to be spent engaged in physical activity.<sup>2</sup> In addition, an increase in the number of households where both parents work out of the home and obstacles such as language, economics, and concerns about safety, or even using the TV or computer as a babysitter contribute to keeping kids inside. Combine the effects of such inactivity with an increasingly poor diet consisting of more fast-food choices and our children are becoming more susceptible to obesity, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease, among other things. In fact, according to a 2001 report by the U.S. Surgeon General, inactivity combined with poor diet contributes to more than 30,000 deaths per year. While these statistics are alarming, even more disconcerting is the fact that these diseases are largely preventable with the right mix of diet and physical activity.

To raise awareness about this growing problem within the Hispanic community, the CDC launched a campaign called VERB™ Ponte las pilas™. The goal is to encourage tweens to find their “VERB” -- actions or activities they enjoy doing like running, swimming, or participating in team sports -- and making it what they do on a regular basis. The campaign also seeks to inform Hispanic/Latino tweens and parents about the fact that the CDC recommends 60 minutes of daily physical activity for tweens (9-13-year-old children) as a way of reducing the risk of obesity and type 2 diabetes.

VERB™ Ponte las pilas™ is trying to improve the well-being of our youth by reaching out to parents and communities and encouraging them to support tweens in their quest for physical activity. The campaign strives to improve the wellness of our youth with a message of practicing regular physical activity. Research shows that regular physical activity – any bodily movement that burns energy – practiced individually or within a group not only improves health but also increases self-esteem. Furthermore, it provides an outlet for self-expression, builds social and leadership skills, and gives an overall sense of social belonging.

The VERB campaign also calls on parents and other influential adults such as teachers and caregivers to help modify the behavior of children. With the help of various media, partnerships with community groups as well as national, state, government, and corporate organizations, the CDC is determined to create a healthy generation of children who will be well prepared for the opportunities and challenges the future has in store for them. Ultimately, to meet the goal of children participating in at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day, parents need to learn about resources in their communities, from schools to parks and recreation facilities - even local newspapers. All of these places can help their kids find their “verb” and get moving!

If you would like more information in Spanish about physical activity or ideas about how to get children involved in physical activity please visit [www.VERBparents.com/espanol](http://www.VERBparents.com/espanol). For questions about the campaign answered in Spanish or English please contact Galeana Y. Woodson, 210-222-1591, ext. 224.

For information about the CDC in English, go to:

**CDC:**

<http://www.cdc.gov>

**VERB:**

<http://www.cdc.gov/VERB> or <http://www.VERBparents.com>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) works hard to make all Americans live safer and healthier.

#### Sources

<sup>1</sup>Statement on Diabetes, 1999 Congressional Hispanic Caucus Hearing

<sup>2</sup>Woodard EH, Media in the Home 2000. The 5th Annual Survey of Parents and Children 2000. Annenberg Public Policy Center, University of Pennsylvania, 2000