
CHILDREN AND WEIGHT: TAKING ACTION IN SOLANO COUNTY

A Strategic Plan to Improve Our Children's Health



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Children and Weight Coalition of Solano County
Funded by *The California Endowment*

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CHILDREN AND WEIGHT: TAKING ACTION IN SOLANO COUNTY

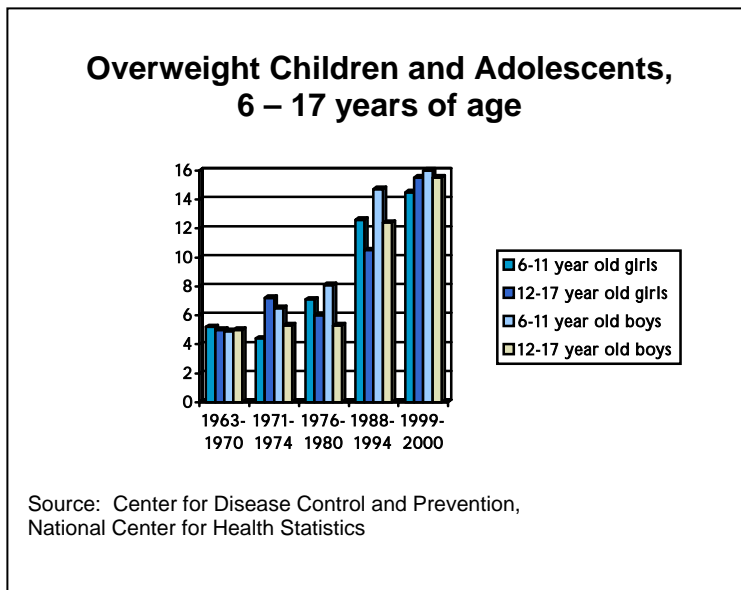
A Strategic Plan to Improve Our Children's Health

Childhood overweight and physical inactivity have reached epidemic levels in the nation and California, including Solano County. As a result, our children are having serious health problems now and more problems are predicted for the future. This epidemic is creating expensive and preventable long-term costs to both their quality of life and our economy. **Medical care costs associated with obesity are greater than those for both smoking and problem drinking combined.** In California, the 2001 weight-related health costs for both adults and children were estimated at \$14.2 billion a year.

Preventing and treating childhood overweight are among the most important of the new health challenges that we face. This Strategic Plan provides action steps that can be taken to address childhood overweight in Solano County.

SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

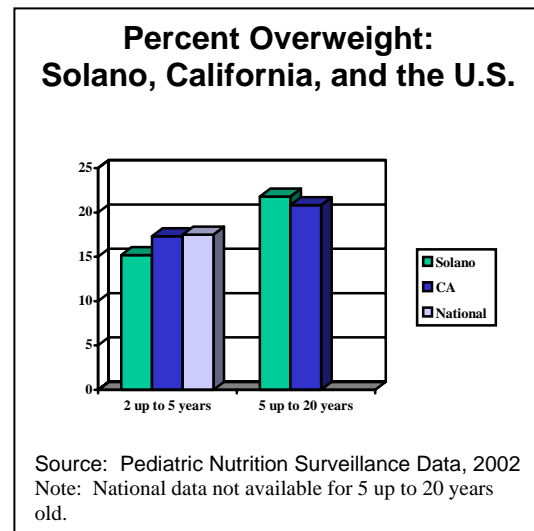
Nationally, one in five children are overweight or at risk for being overweight with the number of overweight children nearly doubling over the past two decades. American teenagers have higher rates of obesity than those in 14 other industrial countries. There has also been an increase in our sedentary activity with over 30 percent of children reported watching television five or more hours per day. More than 30 percent of youth do not regularly participate in either moderate or vigorous physical activity.



In California, the prevalence of overweight children is higher than the national average for all ethnic groups and is increasing annually. There are high rates of overweight and unfit children in all of the state's 80 Assembly Districts. Over 15 percent of 2 to 5 year olds are overweight. Almost 38 percent of 5 to 19 year olds are either overweight or at risk of being overweight. Only 20 percent of 5th, 7th, and 9th graders are physically fit. In addition, overweight rates are higher for children and youth who are Mexican American, African American, and Native American.

Solano County has a higher rate of overweight children and youth, ages 5 up to 20 years old, than the state rate.

- For children 2 up to 5 years old, over 15 percent are overweight and 16 percent are at risk of being overweight. For preschoolers enrolled in Head Start, over 38 percent are either overweight or at risk of being overweight.
- For children and youth, 5 up to 20 years old, 21 percent are overweight and 17.6 percent are at risk of being overweight. **Solano county ranked fourth highest in the overweight rate among Bay Area counties for this age group.**
- In Assembly Districts 7 and 8, about 27 percent of children are overweight and 38 to 40 percent of children are unfit in Assembly Districts 7 and 8.



CONSEQUENCES OF CHILDHOOD OVERWEIGHT

Children today may be the first generation in America that have shorter life expectancies than their parents, if the trend of childhood overweight and physical inactivity continues. Significant research indicates that excess weight and physical inactivity put our children at risk for chronic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, some cancers, asthma, reproductive problems, and joint problems. Other health and psychological problems associated with overweight in children include sleep disorders, low self-esteem, poor body image, and disordered eating.

Children today may have shorter lives than their parents.

Type 2 diabetes, previously considered an adult disease, has increased dramatically in children and adolescents. **A child born in 2000 has a one in three chance of developing type 2 diabetes with the risk higher for Mexican American and African American children.** Overweight and obesity are closely linked to type 2 diabetes.

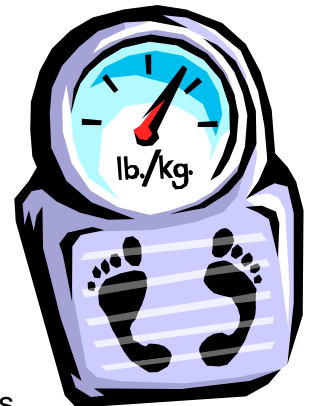
Fifty percent of overweight children and teens will remain overweight as adults and 26 to 41 percent of overweight preschool children will become overweight adults. This puts them at a much higher risk for heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes later in life.

CAUSES

The basic cause of overweight is an imbalance between caloric intake and energy expenditure – too many calories, not enough physical activity, or both. Childhood overweight and physical inactivity are influenced by various individual, genetic, social, and environmental factors. There are factors that we cannot change– a child’s body type and growth potential, ethnicity, one or two obese parents, few or no siblings, low income, older parents, and parents with less education. However, there are other factors that we can change. We now live in an environment of convenience, labor-saving devices, and readily available foods with high caloric density – an environment conducive to the genetic expression of obesity.

Risk factors for childhood overweight that can be changed through effective community and school programs and changes in the environment include, but are not limited to:

- Low breastfeeding rates
- Parenting styles that do not model appropriate eating and physical activity behaviors
- Eating patterns – increase in portion sizes, reliance on eating fast foods and soft drinks, decrease in eating meals as a family, and availability of soda and fast foods on school campuses
- Physical activity - poor physical activity infrastructures in schools and communities and limited compliance with physical education requirements in the schools
- Television and screen time – increase in time children spend watching television and/or playing video games, etc.
- Advertising of foods low in nutritional value to children and their families
- Other environmental factors, such as lack of safe places to walk and bike and limited recreational opportunities.



CHILDREN AND WEIGHT COALITION OF SOLANO COUNTY

The mission of the Children and Weight Coalition of Solano County (CWCS) is to improve the health and well being of children and their families by creating an environment that promotes healthy lifestyles. It is a dynamic organization formed in 2001 by professionals from the Solano County Departments of Health and Social Services and the University of California Cooperative Extension, Solano County. CWCS currently lists over 75 agencies and individuals as members. It is working to develop and implement effective solutions to address the growing epidemic of overweight children, using the talents and resources of the county and its communities.

Initially, the CWCS participated in a pilot project sponsored by the Center for Weight and Health, University of California, Berkeley. The initial goal was to educate interested community members about the epidemic of overweight children, the complex components

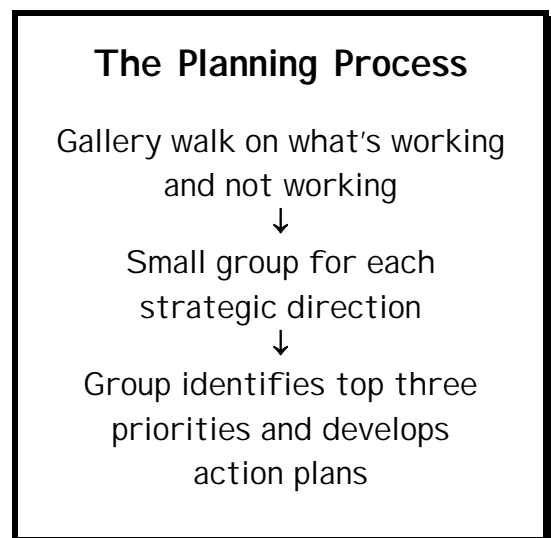
of the problem, and develop action plans. In October 2002, CWCSC members addressed the Board of Supervisors regarding childhood overweight, health costs to our community and Solano County, and resources available to help with this trend. The CWCSC also sponsored a countywide forum to kick-off community actions and events. In February 2003, the Coalition was awarded a grant from The California Endowment to develop a countywide strategic plan and a social marketing plan. The following statements are the basis for a shared vision for addressing children and weight:

- We recognize each child as a unique individual and each family as a unique group of individuals.
- We celebrate differences in body size and shape among children and adults.
- We view all bodies as good bodies. There is no such thing as a bad body.
- We respect the bodies of others even though they might be different from our own. We encourage children to demonstrate respect for the bodies of others.
- We believe that approaches to decreasing pediatric obesity must be based on sound scientific research.
- We believe that the best way to decrease obesity is to create environments that promote healthy lifestyles.
- We promote body satisfaction, high self-esteem, and a positive body image for children and adults.
- We believe that the vast majority of parents love their children and are committed to fostering their health and welfare.
- We know that our children are our future; we are strongly committed to caring for them and creating a world in which they can thrive.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

From April to December 2003, CWCSC conducted eight community forums to gather information useful in developing a countywide strategic plan for childhood overweight in Solano County. The forums were conducted in the communities of Benicia, Dixon, Fairfield/ Suisun/Travis, Rio Vista, Vacaville, and Vallejo. Forums were also conducted for schools and for medical and health providers in the county. The purpose of the forums was to identify what is currently being done in each community and what needs to be done, and to develop action plans that address the unique needs of each community.

An overview on overweight children; its impact on children's health; and the role of the environment, food choices, and physical activity on children's weight were presented. Following the overview, the planning process



included having participants identify what was working and not working in four to five strategic directions in their community. The strategic directions included Food Choices; Physical Activity; Home and Family Environment; School Environment, including School Nutrition and Physical Activity Policy; and Community Environment. Other areas included Medical and Health Care Environment, Staff Wellness, and Worksite Wellness.

Over 420 individuals participated in the planning process and provided input into the strategic directions. Participants included a wide representation from the communities and county. Among those attending were a Board of Supervisors member, mayor, vice mayor, school board members, county and city staff, school administrators, teachers, parents, students, park and recreation staff, child care providers, city council members, community youth organization staff, physicians, nurses, nutritionists, health care providers, health educators, physical education teachers, school nurses, parent groups, and business leaders.

TAKING ACTION IN SOLANO COUNTY

It is quite likely that children and adults will continue to become more overweight unless we make a concerted effort to create an environment that promotes a healthy lifestyle. Children cannot control their environment. Although early intervention is an important key, it is also critical to promote a healthy self-image throughout childhood. It is vital to avoid belittling a child and to remember that a child can hear. Healthy food and physical activity are vital for a child's growth, development, physical fitness, self-esteem, and ability and readiness to learn.

Many people believe that dealing with overweight children is a personal and family responsibility. Parents and caregivers are responsible for managing their children's nutrition and activity. But it is also a school and community responsibility. When there are no safe, accessible places for children to play or ride their bike, when school lunchrooms do not provide healthy and appealing food choices, when new or expectant mothers are not educated about the benefits of breastfeeding, and when physical education is not included daily in our schools, it becomes a school and community responsibility.

It is quite likely that children and adults will continue to become more overweight unless we make a concerted effort to create an environment that promotes a healthy lifestyle.

Successful efforts to address childhood overweight must focus on an ecological approach addressing the influences at many levels as the following diagram indicates.



Families and communities lie at the foundation of influence and change. Emphasis should be placed on opportunities for communication, education, and peer support in maintaining healthy food choices and physical activity patterns.

As a result of the CWCS planning process, action plans for each community were consolidated into a countywide strategic plan. (Individual community action plans can be found in the Appendix.) Four strategic directions were identified as having the greatest impact on children and their environment: Home and Family Environment, School Environment, Community Environment, and Health Care Systems.

"Children have never been very good at listening to their elders but they never fail to imitate them."

- James Baldwin

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SOLANO COUNTY



Strategic Direction: Home and Family Environment

Parents and family have a tremendous impact in determining a child's behavior toward their food choices and daily physical activity. Parents and caregivers are the gatekeepers in the home for making healthy food choices available and in providing opportunities for active play. Family members can share their own knowledge and habits on healthy food choices and physical activity with their children by modeling this behavior in the home. Actions identified to assist families in providing a healthy and active environment for their children are:

- Encourage parents and caregivers to increase time for active play with their children and to set limits on television watching and screen time.
- Provide classes to educate parents, children, and teens about healthy food choices and teach ways to prepare simple, quick healthy meals and snacks that limit sugar and fat and increase dietary fiber.
- Establish affordable physical activity programs for families that can be used at home or in the community.
- Educate parents and promote ways they can be positive role models for their children by making healthy food choices and by maintaining a physically active lifestyle.
- Provide information and classes to parents and teens on planning healthy meals and the benefits of eating meals together as a family.
- Provide parents and caregivers with fun, effective ways to increase active play with their children.



Strategic Direction: School Environment

Schools are a key setting to help address childhood overweight. Most children spend a large portion of time in school. Schools provide many opportunities to engage children in selecting healthy food choices, promoting physical activity, and the ability to reinforce these messages. Actions identified for schools to foster a healthier, more active environment for children are:

- Increase the awareness of school board members, administrators, principals, and other leaders on the importance of physical activity and healthy food choices for students.
 - Talk to school boards about Jack O'Connell's 2003 Superintendent Challenge or similar programs.
 - Increase the availability and quality of healthy food choices throughout school campuses.
 - Limit sweetened beverages and offer healthier food choices in soda and vending machines throughout the school campus.

- Train teachers on healthy, inexpensive snack ideas.
 - Provide information to students on the calories, serving sizes, and nutrition content of the food choices on campus.
 - Provide information to parents on what to pack for healthy lunches and snacks for their children.
 - Expand the summer school lunch program in schools.
 - Provide training to school food service staff on nutrition, especially for children and teens.
 - Incorporate healthy foods at special school events and for snacks.
- Provide multi-level physical education activities and programs in schools, including activities and programs for disabled children.
 - Provide teacher training in elementary schools for physical education, such as the SPARK program.
 - Reduce the class size of physical education classes.
 - Encourage teachers to take time during class to do stretch or physical activity breaks to increase alertness and learning potential of students.
 - Include daily movement time for all students.
 - Provide indoor facilities for physical activities for children during the winter.
 - Enforce formal physical education for the required minimum time in schools.
- Increase nutrition education in the curriculum for all children in grades K–12, as well as education for teachers and parents.
 - Include hands on activities, such as cooking and gardening, as part of the nutrition education.
 - Provide meal planning and cooking classes for teens in high schools.
 - Provide training to teachers on ways to incorporate nutrition education in the classroom.
- Allow sufficient time for students to eat and enjoy lunch and have adequate time for active play during the lunch period.
- Provide parents with information and classes on the importance of physical activity and healthy food choices for their children and ways to accomplish it
- Work with high school leadership classes and encourage students to do community service activities that increase physical activities with younger children, such as walking younger children to and from school.
- Provide school staff with training on the importance of modeling good nutrition and physical activity behaviors.



Strategic Direction: Community Environment

It really does take a village to raise healthy children. The community environment is critical in providing children and their families with the support and infrastructure for living a healthy lifestyle, including the availability of healthy food choices and opportunities for safe, active play. Actions identified for communities to provide a healthier, active environment for children and their families are:

- Increase the availability of low-cost programs that promote non-competitive physical activities for children and teens.
 - Need more programs such as after-school education (i.e. The Place to Be After 3) and skate parks.
 - Offer physical activities for all ages and abilities.
 - Increase physical activity opportunities for special needs children.
 - Expand scholarships for children who may need them and promote their availability.
 - Offer both traditional and non-traditional physical activities at affordable rates.
 - Make sports more affordable and provide transportation for those who need it.
 - Encourage health clubs to include play space and activities for children.
 - Increase affordable family exercise programs.
 - Promote increased use of and activities at community centers and encourage centers to provide healthy snacks offerings.
- Increase neighborhood safety to encourage children to walk to school, go biking, and play outside.
 - Install countdown crosswalks, especially near schools.
 - Increase police patrols along bike and walk paths and in neighborhoods.
 - Provide safe sidewalks with adequate lighting.
 - Provide safe bike paths with maps to encourage children to go biking.
- Create community environments that provide safe physical activity for children and adults, such as safe sidewalks, parks, and recreational areas.
- Increase networking and bilingual communications about community opportunities to non-English speaking families.
- Increase access to healthy food choices in low income neighborhoods by encouraging supermarkets and farmers markets in these areas.
- Establish a community Healthy Living Festival that promotes healthy food choices, physical activity, and a healthy lifestyle.
- Educate restaurants, including fast food and ethnic restaurants, about nutrition, using healthy cooking techniques, and providing healthy food options.
- Increase parent education programs on healthy eating and physical activity for their families.
- Expand the Summer School Lunch Program.



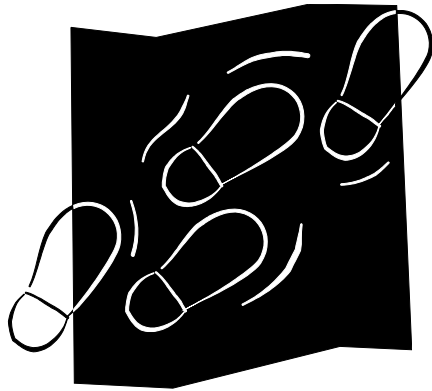
Strategic Direction: Health Care Systems

Identifying children who are overweight or are at risk of becoming overweight is an important initial step in helping children and their families. Because of the short and long term health problems with obesity, early intervention is an important step. One study found that only seven percent of all kids who were obese actually were diagnosed with obesity. Effective programs that include evaluation, prevention and treatment are needed in the health care system to assist children and families in living a healthy, active lifestyle. Health care providers have the unique opportunity to advise children on being active and making healthy food choices, identify children who are overweight or at risk of being overweight, and motivate families at risk to make lifestyle changes. Actions identified for the health care system to provide effective evaluation and management of children who are overweight or at risk of being overweight are:

- Increase the intervention and prevention of obesity into adulthood by training and motivating medical providers to use the Body Mass Index (BMI) for children.
- Create clinical pathways that provide increased follow up referrals to Registered Dietitians and health education programs, such as family meal planning, physical activity, healthy eating, and healthy food choices.
- Provide more clinic-based organized programs, such as Shape-down within the medical facility.
- Provide health education tools with positive messages within a clinical setting.
- Develop effective ways to bring families together to manage a child's weight issue.
- Provide classes for parents on healthy eating and physical activity for their children.
- Encourage parents to take their children to routine well-child exams and inform them of available resources for their family.
- Educate health professionals on the importance of promoting breastfeeding to mothers and their families and how to support breastfeeding mothers.

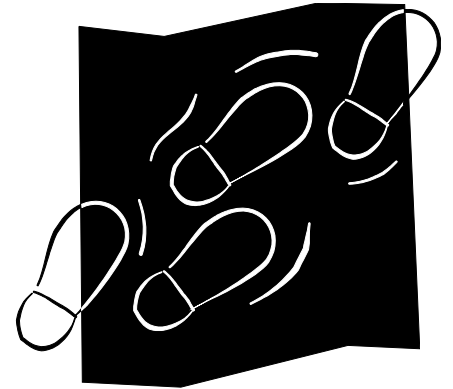
CALL TO ACTION

The time for action is now! Our children and youth are our future. They need to live in healthy and nurturing environments that promote and value physical activity and healthy food choices. Addressing childhood overweight will require action in many areas as outlined in this strategic plan. The home, family, school, and community



environments, and the health care system are the strategic directions on which to focus in reducing the number of

overweight children in Solano County. Working together, we can take the steps needed so that our children and youth will be healthier, able to achieve their full potential, have a longer life expectancy, and be productive, healthy citizens in the future.



APPENDICES

Appendix A: Glossary & References

Appendix B: Internet Resources for Healthy Children

APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY

Body Mass Index (BMI) – A single number that evaluates an individual's weight status in relation to height. A mathematical formula in which a person's body weight in kilograms is divided by the square of his/her height in meters, i.e. weight/ (height)². In children and teens, body mass index is used to assess underweight, risk for overweight, and overweight. Overweight is the preferred scientific term used for children rather than obesity.

At Risk of Overweight – Based on the 2000 CDC growth charts, percentiles of the 85th to the 95th percentile BMI-for-age for children 2 years of age and older.

Overweight – Based on the 2000 CDC growth charts, percentiles of greater than the 95th percentile BMI-for-age for children two years of age and older.

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APPENDIX B: INTERNET RESOURCES FOR HEALTHY CHILDREN

Children and Weight Coalition of Solano County: www.cwcsc.com

Nutrition Education and Promotion:

- American Cancer Society: www.cancer.org
- American Dietetic Association: www.eatright.org/
- American School Food Services Association: www.asfsa.org
- Bright Futures: www.brightfutures.org/index.html
- California 5 a Day: www.ca5aday.com/programs
- California Center for Public Health Advocacy (Assembly district data): www.publichealthadvocacy.org/policy_briefs/overweight_and_unfit.html
- California Dairy Council: www.dairycouncilofca.org
- California Department of Education, Nutrition Services Division: www.cde.ca.gov/nsd/
- California Nutrition Network: www.dhs.ca.gov/cpns
- California Walk to School Headquarters: www.cawalktoschool.com
- California School Food Services Association: www.csfsa.org
- Center for Disease Control—Obesity: www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/pr-obesity.htm
- Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI): www.cspinet.org/
- Center for Weight and Health: www.cnr.berkeley.edu/cwh
- Dole 5-a-day: www.dole5aday.com/
- Fit WIC: www.cnr.berkeley.edu/cwh/index.html
- Healthy Kids Challenge: www.healthykidschallenge.com
- Healthy School Index: www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/SHI/
- Healthy Transportation Network: www.healthytransportation.net
- Nutrition Explorations, National Dairy Council: www.nutritionexplorations.org/
- Project LEAN: www.dhs.ca.gov/lean
- Project LEAN and California 5 A Day Power Play: www.healthedcouncil.org
- SPARKS: www.foundation.sdsu.edu/projects/sparks/
- Team Nutrition and Changing the Scene: www.fns.usda.gov/tn
- The Community Toolbox Website: www.ctb.ukans.edu
- The Prevention Institute: www.preventioninstitute.org
- United States Department of Agriculture: www.usda.gov

Web Sites For Kids And Families:

- California Dairy Council: www.dairycouncilofca.org
- Eat Smart. Play Hard: www.fns.usda.gov/eatsmartplayhard
- Food and Nutrition Center: www.nalusda.gov/fnic
- Kidnetic: www.kidnetic.com/
- National Dairy Council: www.nutritionexplorations.com
- Oregon State Dairy Council: www.oregondairycouncil.org
- Project LEAN teen website: www.CAProjectLEAN.org
- TEAM Nutrition: www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/index.htm
- TV Turnoff Network: www.tvturnoff.org
- Washington State Dairy Council: www.eatsmart.org

General Nutrition Resources and Links To Reliable Information:

- California Healthy Kids: www.californiahealthykids.org
- Feeding Kids newsletter and back issues: www.nutritionforkids.com
- Nutrition Navigator (rating guide for nutrition web sites, including families and children): www.navigator.tufts.edu
- Teen nutrition site (body and mind) by Center for Disease Control: www.bam.gov

Overweight & Obesity

- Economic Research Service, USDA - The Diets of America's Children Influence of Dining Out, Household Characteristics, and Nutrition Knowledge: www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aer746
- Halting the Obesity Epidemic: A Public Health Approach: www.cspinet.org/reports/obesity.pdf
- Strategic Alliance to Prevent Childhood Obesity: A School-Community Approach: www.cfpa.net/obesity/straall.htm
- The Healthy Weight Network: www.healthyweightnetwork.com
- California Health Interview Survey: www.chis.ucla.edu
- California Dietary Practices Survey, children and teen surveys: www.ca5aday.com

School Meals:

- School Lunch Salad Bars: www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/CNP/FILES/saladbar.pdf
- School Dietary Assessment: www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/CNP/CNP.HTM
- School meal participation and fruit and vegetable consumption: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=11138440&dopt=Abstract
- Time spent eating lunch at school: www.nfsmi.org/Information/eating_at_school.pdf
- California School Food Finance Study: www.cfpa.net/obesity/FSFinanceSurvey.pdf
- Changing The Scene: www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/form.htm
- Occidental report: www.uepi.oxy.edu/projects/cfj/resources/nftsp/Government_regulatory_power.htm
- Competitive foods report: www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Lunch/CompetitiveFoods/report_congress.htm
- Current California competitive foods law: www.cde.ca.gov/nsd/npm/nsu/mb00-810.pdf
- Fast Food Survey: www.phis.org/publications/fastfood.pdf
- Commercial activities HEHS-00-156, September 8, 2000: www.gao.gov

Physical Activity

- Active Living Network: www.activeliving.org
- SPARKS: www.foundation.sdsu.edu/projects/sparks/
- California Physical Fitness Test: www.cde.ca.gov
- Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS). www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dash/yrbs/index.htm

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