

AFTERSCHOOL ALERT

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Active Hours Afterschool: Childhood Obesity Prevention & Afterschool Programs

The obesity crisis in America is ubiquitous and irrefutable, and it's hitting youth so hard that health experts warn that this generation of children will be the first to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents. Tackling and reversing this epidemic will require a comprehensive and sustained effort in every community in America. The nation's growing network of afterschool providers can make a significant contribution to this battle. Afterschool programs can provide physical activity and nutrition education, healthy snacks and a safe place to play and socialize in the hours after school.

Childhood obesity is a growing epidemic.

- + In the past 30 years, the percentage of children in the U.S. who are overweight has more than doubled, and the number of teenagers who are overweight has nearly tripled. (National Center for Health Statistics, 2004)
- + A 2006 study predicts that by the year 2010 more than 46 percent of school-age children in the Americas will be overweight and one in seven will be obese. (International Journal of Pediatric Obesity, 2006)

The health and economic costs are astounding.

- + In 2003, obesity-attributable medical expenditures in the U.S. were estimated to be \$75 billion, approximately one-half of which were financed by Medicare and Medicaid. (Obesity Research, 2004)
- + The hospital costs for complications resulting from obesity in youth ages 6-17 soared from \$35 million in 1979 to \$127 million in 1999. (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2002)
- + Severely obese children and adolescents have lower health-related quality of life than non-obese children and have health-related quality of life similar to children and adolescents with cancer. (Journal of the American Medical Association, 2003)
- + The National Centers for Disease Control predicts that one in three U.S. children born in 2000 will develop diabetes in their lifetime, and nearly half of African-American and Hispanic children are likely to develop the disease. (National Centers for Disease Control, 2003)

Children are not getting enough physical activity and have unhealthy eating habits.

- + 61.5 percent of children ages 9-13 do not participate in any organized physical activity outside of school hours, and 22.6 percent do not engage in any type of physical activity during free time. (National Centers for Disease Control, 2003)
- + On average, children in the United States spend almost 6.5 hours each day consuming media. (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2005)
- + In 2000, fewer than 10 percent of elementary, junior high, middle and high schools surveyed provided daily physical education or an equivalent, and fewer than half of all schools offered any out-of-school time intramural activities or physical activity clubs for students. (National Centers for Disease Control, 2000)
- + In 2003, just one-fifth of youth in grades 9-12 consumed the recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables. (National Centers for Disease Control, 2004)

Afterschool programs can help combat the epidemic of childhood obesity.

Additional before- and after- school programs will also help decrease child obesity, expand physical activity, and increase parent and community involvement in schools.

– New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson in his 2006 State of the State Address.

- + The Food Research and Action Council identifies afterschool programs as effective venues for improving nutrition, nutrition education and physical activity (Food Research and Action Council, 2006)
- + The Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Secretary of Education, in their 2000 report to the President, “Promoting Better Health for Young People Through Physical Activity and Sports,” identified afterschool programs as a means to provide opportunities for youth to be physically active and called for support to enable afterschool programs to do so. (National Centers for Disease Control, 2000)
- + In the landmark report “The Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity,” former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher recommended that schools take action to provide opportunities for extracurricular physical activity such as intramural sports and physical activity clubs. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001)
- + The American Academy of Pediatrics’ Committees on Sports Medicine and Fitness and School Health recommend that schools provide extra-curricular and out-of-school-time physical activity programs that are inclusive of the needs and interests of the students. (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2000)
- + A study of afterschool program participants in three elementary schools found that the afterschool participants were significantly less likely to be obese at the follow-up and were more likely to have increased acceptance among their peers. (Applied Developmental Science, 2005)
- + A twelve-week intervention program featuring afterschool dance classes for African American girls between the ages of eight and 10 resulted in lower body mass index, increased physical activity and a trend toward improved grades at school. (Ethnicity & Disease, 2003)

Afterschool program models in practice.

The physical activity and health promotion activities that take place in the hours after school can be as varied as the programs that provide them. Activities can take place in a traditional afterschool setting and can be integrated into a traditional homework and tutoring format, or they can be part of a broader approach in which classroom learning and afterschool activities are part of a coordinated approach to address specific health concerns.

- ♦ In 1998, the University of Utah and the Utah Starzz of the WNBA formed a partnership with two Salt Lake City middle schools to create the afterschool physical activity program “U Move with the Starzz.” The program was created to promote healthy lifestyles through physical activity for urban, adolescent girls in the seventh and eighth grades. The popular program features facilitated activity sessions, cooperative activities and the creation of individual physical activity goals. Interns from the University of Utah visit the program sites on a weekly basis to facilitate the physical sessions, and players and coaches of the Utah Starzz frequently visit. (JOPERD, 2000)
- ♦ Each day after school, the student members of the Arriba Health Club at Roosevelt Elementary School in Santa Ana, California, are getting a workout. They are participating in a program started by the community group Latino Health Access as a means to improve eating habits and encourage physical activity. During their time spent in the club, students actively participate in a variety of physical activities, from team sports to calisthenics. They also engage in activities such as Five-A-Day Bingo to promote healthy eating habits. (Newsweek, 2003)
- ♦ The Mount Diablo Unified School District After School Program in Northern California promotes physical activity and nutrition for students in the first through eighth grades during the afterschool hours. Located at 14 sites throughout the district, each program provides 7 hours of physical activity and nutrition instruction per week. The students receive 30 minutes of physical activity per day, using “fitness cards” that include self-paced and self-monitored physical activities for the students to complete. For the nutrition component, the students participate in a garden-based nutrition program that focuses on the development of healthy eating habits with an emphasis on eating five servings of fruit and vegetables a day. (California Nutrition Network, 2003)