

# Child Care & the Community

## Summer 2009

### **Reversing the childhood obesity epidemic is a critical ingredient for delivering a healthier population and making health reform work.**

Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, M.D., RWJF President / CEO

How early in a child's life are the issues of obesity and overweight of concern? In the recently-released report "F is for Fat," from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Trust for America's Health, the obesity rate for Wyoming youth ages 10-17 was reported at 25.7 percent, ranking Wyoming 45th of the 50 US states. Of great concern is that childhood obesity rates have more than tripled since 1980. Analysis of data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey shows that one-quarter of US children two to five are overweight, with early signs of cardiovascular risk.

Family and home environments have the greatest influence on children's early nutrition and exercise habits, but the impact of other influences is rising. A research study detailing the **child care connection to prevention of childhood obesity** was published by the Centers for Disease Control in January 2009.

The childcare setting has been largely overlooked in the childhood obesity discussion, as approximately one of every four children ages two to five in the US has a high ( $\geq$  85th percentile for age) Body Mass Index. The study cites the important ways in which child care is an untapped setting for obesity prevention, according to CDC researchers Kaphingst and Story who examined state licensing regulations related to nutrition, physical activity and media use for preschool-aged children in the US.

Assessments of obesity-related themes were analyzed based on standards and recommendations from the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005*, *National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care* and a 2005 position paper of the American Dietetic Association.

Wyoming's licensing regulations were examined for child care centers, small family child care homes, and large family group child care homes, using 2006 data posted on state websites. Head Start centers were not included in the study because care provided is subject to the federal Head Start Program Performance Standards. Specific results of the child care licensing regulations in Wyoming includes:

**Nutrition**—Specifies proportion of children's daily nutrition needs to be offered per meal or by length of time in care; applies to child care centers, large family/group child care homes and small family child care homes. The most common US regulation was for child care providers to follow the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) or similar meal pattern requirements.

**Physical Activity**—Requires that activity programs of child care facilities must provide large muscle or gross motor activity, development, and/or equipment; applied to child care centers and large family/group child care homes, but not small family child care homes. Some states require that children have daily outdoor activity time.

**Media Use**—Wyoming has no regulation on media use ["screen time" such as television, computers, videos/DVDs, video games] in child care settings. Examples of such regulation include a definition of appropriate inclusion of media in the child care program of activities, or setting the maximum amount of time for media each day or week.



Additional legislative actions which Wyoming has in place to address issues of children's obesity and overweight are requirements for Physical Education in elementary, middle and high schools; Health Education requirements for schools; CDC funding for Healthy Communities and Coordinated School Health programs; and a four percent sales tax on vending machine sales of snacks and sodas.

### **Discussion and Recommendations:**

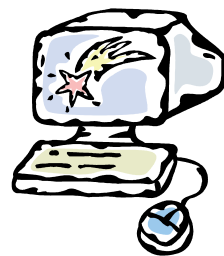
**Child care presents a tremendous opportunity to help children develop healthful nutrition and physical activity, attitudes and behaviors,** according to research.

Opportunities exist for strengthening state licensing regulations to prevent childhood obesity in the child care setting. State child care licensing offices can work with public health, nutrition and physical activity experts to develop regulations that are health-promoting and realistically adoptable.

Little research has explored the **nutritional quality of foods and beverages** provided in the child care setting, and findings of the study suggest that there may be cause for concern in this area, particularly in those facilities not enrolled in the CACFP. The food component most often missing from meals was fruits and vegetables. Other studies indicate that children in child care settings do not get sufficient grains or dairy to meet the Food Guide Pyramid recommendations.

**Physical activity positively affects overall health** and helps prevent obesity, therefore it is important to create environments which are supportive of both structured and unstructured physical activity. Aspects of the environment related to physical activity behavior include ample opportunity for active play, portable and fixed play equipment, and physical activity training and education of the staff.

**Children in the US are exposed to media use from their earliest years.** Few studies have examined children's media use in child care settings. A 2003 study from the Kaiser Family Foundation reported that children aged six years and older spend an average of two hours per day with screen media, mostly television and videos. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that television time should be limited to no more than one to two hours of *quality* programming per day for children *over two years of age*. Other research has found that television exposure is a risk factor for being overweight in preschoolers.



The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Trust for America's Health report also calls for a **National Strategy to Combat Obesity** that would define roles and abilities for federal, state and local governments and promote collaboration among businesses, communities, schools and families. It would seek to advance policies that

- ✓ Provide healthy foods and beverages to students at schools;
- ✓ Increase the availability of affordable healthy foods in all communities;
- ✓ Increase the frequency, intensity, and duration of physical activity at school;
- ✓ Improve access to safe and healthy places to live, work, learn, and play;
- ✓ Limit screen time; and
- ✓ Encourage employers to provide workplace wellness programs.

### **Sources of additional information:**

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention; [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)  
Trust for America's Health; [www.healthyamericans.org](http://www.healthyamericans.org)  
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation; [www.rwjf.org](http://www.rwjf.org)  
Institute of Medicine; [www.iom.edu](http://www.iom.edu)  
US Dept of Health & Human Services, USDA Dietary Guide lines for Americans; [www.health.gov/resources](http://www.health.gov/resources)  
American Dietetic Association, Position Paper: benchmarks for nutrition programs in child care settings  
[www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)  
Kaiser Family Foundation; [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org)  
Action for Healthy Kids, [www.actionforhealthykids.org](http://www.actionforhealthykids.org)

Life begins as a quest of the child for the man  
and ends as a journey by the man to rediscover the child.

Laurens Van Der Post

**UPDATE!!** **Natrona County, Sweetwater County** and the **Wind River Reservation** community collaborations were awarded the first Wyoming Kids First Planning Grants in April. The grants provide \$50,000 in funds that will help staff and operate a Wyoming Kids First office in their county. These Wyoming Kids First Regional Partnerships will be responsible for building an early childhood system on the local level for children zero to age eight. This pilot program is funded with seed money through the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services.

Six additional regions, **Laramie County, Converse County, Weston County, Sheridan County, Teton County and Sublette County**, are developing Wyoming Kids First Partnerships.

All regions are receiving training and technical assistance from the Wyoming Early Childhood Partnership (WECP). In addition, each regional partnership will be supported through the placement of an AmeriCorps Volunteer in Service to America (VISTA) who can either lead the program or assist with the work.

The initial work of the Regional Partnerships will include • conducting a community assessment to identify gaps in services in the priority areas of early care and education, physical, mental and emotional health and family support • developing a strategic plan to prioritize and address these needs • and developing a public engagement plan. For more information contact Wyoming Kids First at 307-472-2152 or website [www.wyokidsfirst.org](http://www.wyokidsfirst.org)



Casper child care provider **Laurie Stadtfeld**, owner of **Laurie's Inn**, has completed months-long preparation of Wyoming's first certified Nature Explore Outdoor Classroom. "My little ones and my parents have been so helpful and so patient as this came together," says Stadtfeld. "And I see real change in their behaviors because they can spend this wonderful time outside." Stadtfeld used a mini-grant from Children & Nutrition Services to help create the raised flower and vegetable gardens.

The Arbor Day Foundation created the program to encourage youth to include nature in everyday learning. Stadtfeld traveled to Nebraska for Arbor Day Foundation workshops to study and meet the certification requirements:

- Well-designed outdoor space, incorporating the principles of Learning with Nature to the design of new spaces, or the redesign of existing spaces.
- Staff development with participation in full-length Nature Explore Workshops
- Family involvement with activities or materials designed to increase family awareness and assure that involvement in nature education for young children is provided regularly.



A total of 23 certified Nature Explore Outdoor Classrooms are spread through the United States, in California, Georgia, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York and Ohio. An interactive map and virtual tours of these classrooms can be found on at [www.arborday.org/explore/classroom](http://www.arborday.org/explore/classroom).

Stadtfeld hosted a recent open house, featuring several centers for children to work as parents learned more about the Nature Explore concept. Projects included making butterflies and a bee condo. "Many of my parents are doing more outdoor activities at home," Stadtfeld said. "It's so neat to get the kiddos back outside!"



**Congratulations Laurie on a job well-done!**