



Announcement January 29, 2010

HHS Secretary and Surgeon General Join First Lady to Announce Plans to Combat Overweight and Obesity and Support Healthy Choices

First Lady Michelle Obama, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and U.S. Surgeon General Regina Benjamin announced plans today to help Americans lead healthier lives through better nutrition, regular physical activity, and by encouraging communities to support healthy choices. At a YMCA in Alexandria, VA, they talked directly with national and local leaders, parents and health professionals about reducing overweight and obesity in adults and children.

The First Lady recently announced that she will launch a major initiative on childhood obesity in the next few weeks and has asked HHS to play a key role. Today, HHS released The Surgeon General's Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation. In her first release to the nation, Dr. Benjamin highlights the alarming trend of overweight and obese Americans, and asks them to join her in a grassroots effort to commit to changes that promote the health and wellness of our families and communities.

"The surge in obesity in this country is nothing short of a public health crisis that is threatening our children, our families, and our future," said First Lady Michelle Obama. "In fact, the health consequences are so severe that medical experts have warned that our children could be on track to live shorter lives than their parents. The paper released today is an incredibly important step in directing the Nation's attention to solving the obesity epidemic and we do not have a moment to waste."

The prevalence of obesity has more than doubled among adults and has tripled among children and adolescents from 1980 to 2004. Currently, two-thirds of adults and nearly one in three children are overweight or obese. Increased food intake, a sedentary lifestyle, and environments that make it difficult for people to make healthy choices but easy to consume extra calories, all contribute to the epidemic of overweight and obesity. This epidemic threatens the progress we have made in increasing Americans' quality and years of healthy life.

"Curbing the obesity epidemic requires committed people and organizations across the nation working together to take action," said Secretary Sebelius. "Today, we outline a vision for the nation that requires parents, neighborhoods, the medical community, employers, schools and individuals to take a coordinated and comprehensive approach to combating overweight and obesity."

Additionally, many racial and ethnic groups and geographic regions of the United States are disproportionately affected. For instance, African American girls and Hispanic boys are more likely to be obese compared to non-Hispanic whites. Among adults, American Indian and Alaskan native adults have the highest rates of obesity. The sobering impact of these numbers is reflected in the nation's concurrent epidemics of diabetes, heart disease and other chronic diseases. Researchers warn that if trends are not reversed, our children will be seriously afflicted with medical conditions such as diabetes and heart disease in early adulthood.

"Americans will be more likely to change their behavior if they have a meaningful reward - something more than just reaching a certain weight or dress size," said Dr. Benjamin. "The real reward is invigorating, energizing, joyous health. It is a level of health that allows people to embrace each day and live their lives to the fullest without disease or disability."

The recommendations in The Surgeon General's Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation include:

Improving our communities – Neighborhoods and communities should become actively involved in creating healthier environments. The availability of supermarkets, outdoor recreational facilities and the limitation of advertisements of less healthy foods and beverages are all examples of ways to create a healthier living environment.

Healthy Choices and Healthy Home Environments – Change starts with the individual choices Americans make each day for themselves, their families and those around them. Reducing the consumption of sodas and juices with added sugars; eating more fruits, vegetables and whole grains; limiting television time; and being more physically active help us achieve and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Creating Healthy Child Care Settings – It is estimated that more than 12 million children ages 0-6 receive some form of child care on a regular basis from someone other than their parents. Parents should talk with their child care providers about changes to promote their children's health.

Creating Healthy Schools – To help students develop life-long health habits, schools should provide appealing healthy food options including fresh fruit and vegetables, whole grains, water and low-fat beverages. School systems should also require nutrition standards and daily physical education for students.

Creating Healthy Work Sites – Employers can implement wellness programs that promote healthy eating in cafeterias, encourage physical activity through group classes and create incentives for employees to participate.

Mobilizing Medical Communities – Medical care providers must make it a priority to teach their patients about the importance of good health. Doctors and other health care providers are often the most trusted source of health information and are powerful role models for healthy lifestyle habits.

To view The Surgeon General's Vision for a Healthy and Fit Nation, visit www.surgeongeneral.gov

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