

Oregon takes on childhood obesity

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

The Oregon Health Policy Commission today released a package of 20 recommendations to fight the epidemic of obesity that plagues school-age children, based on a recently completed study. The top three recommendations include better nutritional standards for food sold in schools, greater availability of physical education classes in schools and an obesity prevention program to provide statewide leadership against obesity. "If we do not act now and take serious steps to prevent obesity in Oregon's children, this public health crisis will only worsen," said Jim Lussier, member of the commission and president emeritus of St. Charles Medical Center in Bend. "We so often focus on improving health within the medical setting, when in fact we need to change our environment to make it easy for people to make healthy choices." Other recommendations include smarter planning for land use and transportation, regulation and subsidies that affect the food and beverage industry, promoting health in the workplace and at the doctor's office, and optimizing public parks and recreation to help families be active. The report titled "Promoting Physical Activity and Healthy Eating Among Oregon's Children" is available on the commission's Web site under "What's New." "We live in a world that makes it easy to consume more calories and harder to engage in physical activity," said Mel Kohn, M.D., state epidemiologist at the Oregon Department of Human Services Public Health Division. "High-calorie, aggressively marketed snack foods are cheap and readily available to children. At the same time, fewer children walk or ride their bikes to school. Once at school, physical education is often unavailable." Kohn chaired two workgroups of state and national experts that developed the recommendations for the commission. The study was conducted at the request of the Gov. Ted Kulongoski and state Sen. Richard Devlin, D-Tualatin, a member of the Oregon Health Policy Commission. The goal of the study was to develop a set of recommendations that can translate into policy or legislative action. Legislators have introduced a host of bills in the current and previous legislative sessions to promote healthy eating and increased physical activity among Oregon's children and families, including House Bill 2650, which seeks to improve the nutritional value of foods sold in schools. "We believe this report provides a framework for legislative discussions, as well as a resource for community leaders working to create health-promoting policies at the local level," said Gretchen Morley, the commission's director. In 2005, nearly one in four eighth and 11th graders were either overweight or at risk of becoming overweight. The study found that obesity tends to persist with age and that overweight adults experience serious health problems, including Type 2 diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol. The study also found that three out of every four eighth graders do not eat the minimum recommended amount of fruits and vegetables. At the 11th grade level, four out of five do not. At the same time, only one in five eighth graders get the minimum recommended amount of exercise. For 11th graders it is one in four.

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