



STATE OF MARYLAND

DHMH PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DHMH Releases Obesity Prevention Plan

Initiative is a 'blueprint for action' for healthier communities

BALTIMORE, MD (May 3, 2006) -- A large scale plan to reduce obesity in Maryland was released today by the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH).

“This plan addresses overweight and obesity across the entire health prevention spectrum,” said Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. “It is a blueprint for action for those who are involved in health prevention efforts to make their communities a wholesome place to live.”

The *Maryland Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan* sets in motion an effort to effect policy, environment and lifestyle changes through businesses, community and faith-based groups, schools and health care systems.

The work of more than 100 individuals representing academia, business, community and faith-based organizations, healthcare systems, nonprofits, professional organizations, and state and local agencies from across Maryland made this comprehensive plan possible.

“Activities and initiatives outlined in the *Maryland Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan* address the full spectrum of Maryland life,” said DHMH Secretary S. Anthony McCann. “It is applicable from corporate boardrooms to rural communities; from medical centers to day care centers.”

The initiative includes a look at healthy lifestyle choices such as promoting breastfeeding, striving for pedestrian-friendly communities, making healthy food choices and encouraging physical activity.

It is designed to strategically influence individuals, families, communities and organizations to incorporate healthy behaviors. Policy-makers, individuals and organizations at all levels can use the plan to guide and inform actions and activities to create supportive environments for a healthier Maryland.

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Obesity can lead to chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, some cancers, and arthritis. Six out of 10 Maryland deaths are caused by chronic disease, and the economic cost associated with obesity is startling. Obesity-attributable medical costs for Maryland adults topped \$1.5 billion in 2003, with \$368 million paid for by Medicare and \$391 million by Medicaid.

Obesity is defined as high amounts of body fat in relation to lean body mass, and is determined by using weight and height to calculate a number called the “body mass index” (BMI). An adult who has a BMI between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight. An adult who has a BMI of 30 or higher is considered obese.

In Maryland, an estimated 2.3 million (58.5 percent) adults are either overweight or obese. Of those, approximately 949,000 (24 percent) are obese by BMI measurements.

The statistics for children are just as dismal. The Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance system (PedNSS) provides information on low-income children from birth to age five in federally funded maternal and child health programs.

In the 2002 PedNSS, the prevalence of overweight in children ages two to five years was 14 percent, a substantial increase from 8.2 percent in 1997. Although the PedNSS population is not representative of all children in Maryland ages two to five years, the increasing trend of overweight children monitored by PedNSS suggests the epidemic is not limited to adults.

A copy of the *Maryland Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan* is available on the department’s Web site at <http://fha.state.md.us/cphs/npa>

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