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## **State health department partners with nonprofit to get kids moving**

Partnership to plan three-month physical activity challenge for Alaska children

Anchorage -- More Alaska elementary school children will have the chance to participate in a three-month Healthy Futures Challenge that makes physical activity fun and encourages kids to start a regular habit of being active.

Healthy Futures, the signature program of the nonprofit Alaska Sports Hall of Fame, is a new partner with the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. Healthy Futures has been promoting and encouraging childhood physical activity since 2003. The department now joins Providence Health & Services Alaska as the two primary sponsors of the program.

Alaska parents concerned about the growing obesity problem in Alaska founded Healthy Futures. Today, about 3 of every 10 children in Alaska are overweight or obese, said Dr. Ward Hurlburt, Alaska's chief medical officer.

"Being overweight at a young age threatens our children's lifelong health," Hurlburt said. "Obese children are more likely to remain obese into adulthood. Obese adults have a higher risk of diabetes, heart disease, certain cancers, even premature death."

The Healthy Futures partnership is one part of a department effort to raise awareness about childhood obesity and encourage families to be physically active to improve overall health and maintain a healthy weight. The department is also running television and radio public service announcements and messages in other media statewide.

The Healthy Futures Challenge will begin in February and conclude at the end of April. Children in participating elementary schools will pick up log forms at school and complete at least 30

minutes of physical activity outside gym class for three days a week. After four weeks, they will turn in their logs at school and receive a prize. The challenge includes three, four-week periods.

The department and Healthy Futures have written to school superintendents, principals and physical education teachers statewide to encourage them to sign up their schools for this physical activity challenge. The partners hope to make it possible for more children to participate and increase the number of kids who complete the challenge, said Cindy Norquest, Healthy Futures program director. Prizes from Healthy Futures reward the children's commitment to physical activity, but also enable them to be active anywhere and anytime. For example, children who complete the entire challenge will earn digital jump ropes that record their number of jumps.

**Schools can sign up for the Healthy Futures Challenge through Jan. 13, 2012, at [www.healthyfuturesak.org](http://www.healthyfuturesak.org). For more information about the challenge and the importance of physical activity, visit the department's new web site, [www.playeveryday.alaska.gov](http://www.playeveryday.alaska.gov).**

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