Child and Adolescent Nutrition in Alaska

Good nutrition and healthy eating habits beginning at a young age are essential for proper growth and development and establishing healthy eating behaviors that are more likely to continue into adulthood. Healthy eating behaviors help prevent childhood and adolescent health problems such as overweight, eating disorders, dental carries, and iron deficiency anemia. Furthermore, good nutrition among children and adolescents helps prevent serious health problems in adulthood, including heart disease, cancer, and stroke – the three leading causes of death among adults.

**Urgency**

- Over the last two decades, the prevalence of overweight among children ages 6-11 years has more than doubled, increasing from 7% during 1980 to 15% during 2000. Overweight among adolescents ages 12-19 years has tripled during the same time period – from 5% to 15%.

- Nationally, 9% of girls ages 12-15 and 11% of girls ages 16-19 years have iron deficiency anemia.

- Nationally, only 13% of girls and 36% of boys ages 12-19 years have adequate calcium intakes.

**Disparities**

Iron deficiency anemia is a serious problem among Alaska Native children and other minorities in Alaska. The prevalence of iron deficiency among children in rural Alaska is approximately 10 times US standards.

Nationally, boys (ages 12-19 years) were nearly 3 times more likely to have adequate calcium intakes than girls.

- Among high school students in Alaska, boys were 2 times more likely than girls to report having consumed three or more glasses of milk per day during the 7 days preceding the survey.

**Economic Loss**

According to a report from the Institute of Medicine, the obesity-associated annual hospital costs for children and youth more than tripled over two decades, increasing from $35 million during 1979-1981 to $127 million during 1997-1999. After adjusting for inflation and converting to 2004 dollars, the national healthcare expenditures related to obesity and overweight in adults alone ranged from $98 billion to $129 billion annually.

**Interventions & Recommendations**

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a supplemental food and nutrition program for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women, and infants and young children.
who are at a nutritional risk. The purpose of the WIC Program is to prevent health problems and to improve the health of participants during critical times of growth and development. The WIC Program provides nutrition education, access to health care services, referrals to health and other social services and vouchers for supplemental foods. The food vouchers list the types and quantities of WIC foods that are consistent with the participant’s nutritional needs.

The classroom can be used to educate students about healthful eating patterns with an emphasis on developing the behavioral skills needed for planning, preparing and selecting healthy foods, and on creating social support for choosing and eating healthy foods. The food services environment supports healthy eating patterns by offering healthy, balanced meals and limiting access to less healthy choices, and serves as a learning laboratory for the classroom. Parent involvement supports and reinforces messages learned at school in the home environment. Schools could further promote healthy nutrition by eliminating unhealthy alternatives from school lunches and removing soda and juice vending machines from school property.

Alaska received funding from the USDA Team Nutrition grant in 2002 to help support healthier changes within the school environment.

The Obesity Prevention and Control Program at the Alaska Department of Public Health can provide more information about these programs and other nutrition education programs for children and youth and may provide support for program implementation.

**Intervention Effectiveness**

With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and National Institute of Health, nutrition interventions have been developed, tested and proven effective in helping children and adolescents develop and maintain healthy eating patterns.

**Capacity**

**Propriety**

Child and adolescent nutrition is an important issue for Maternal Child Health particularly around overweight and obesity among youth. The monitoring of overweight and obesity among youth is an issue that falls within the overall mission of the Women’s, Children’s, and Family Health Section. Increasing the consumption of fruit and vegetables and decreasing overweight among youth are national initiatives (HP2010).

**Economic Feasibility**

Recent changes in the education and graduation standards for Alaska have decreased the requirements for health education including nutrition education. Financial challenges for schools increase the pressure to allocate health education resources to other areas. Additionally, inadequate funding has encouraged some school districts to allow soda and juice vending machines on school property.

**Acceptability**

Acceptability of this issue was not evaluated.

**Resources**

WIC is working on the design of nutrition reports that will provide the data for the population of children WIC serves, utilizing the Body Mass Index growth charts starting at age 2 to 5 years.

Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) can be used to monitor the prevalence of youth behaviors that influence health.

**Legality**

Not an issue.

**References**


**Data Sources**

