

Parents key in fight against obesity, experts say

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BY ALICE ROACH

Health professionals need the help of parents to counter the obesity epidemic, a federal health official said yesterday at a statewide conference focused on battling the bulge.

William Dietz, an obesity expert with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said parents need to encourage physical activity in young people, and minimizing their time in front of the television is one way to do that.

Dietz, noting that 25 percent of 2-year-olds have a TV in their bedroom, recommended eliminating bedroom televisions as well as those in dining areas. He also said parents need to keep TVs out of sight and reduce the number of sets.

“One reason parents are reluctant to control their children’s television time is that they are reluctant to control their (own) television time,” Dietz said.

In his keynote speech at the first Missouri Takes Action on Obesity conference, Dietz outlined an anti-obesity strategy that also includes decreasing soft drink consumption, breast-feeding, eating more fruits and vegetables and smaller portion sizes.

“We rarely implement these strategies simultaneously,” Dietz said. “We should implement them simultaneously. A single intervention strategy is not going to get us very far.”

The conference on Thursday was sponsored by Missouri Council for Activity and Nutrition, the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services and other state associations. About 350 people from schools, communities, health departments and other organizations attended.

Obesity is a rising health issue in Missouri. Sixty-two percent of Missouri adults were overweight or obese in 2004, according to the CDC. Over the past 15 years, obesity cases have almost doubled, and more than 23 percent of Missourians are obese, according to the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services. Missouri children are also increasingly subject to being overweight. In 2003, 32 percent of students in sixth to eighth grades and 27 percent of high school students were overweight or

at risk of becoming overweight, according to the CDC.

Being overweight or obese is linked to more than 30 health conditions, including Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some types of cancer, according to Missouri's Nutrition and Physical Activity Plan.

Stacia Reilly, health educator for the Columbia/Boone County Health Department, said she hoped to learn more at the conference about programs she can tie into what her department is already doing to promote nutrition and physical activity.

The Health Department is already working with Active Living by Design, which works to increase physical activity by looking at community infrastructure and policies; Heart Power, a monthly program at the Columbia Public Library where children ages 3 to 5 learn how nutrition and physical activity impact their lifestyle; and Healthy Eating by Design, which promotes fruit and vegetable consumption at West Boulevard Elementary School.