



Save the Children Applauds New Study on Obesity in the United States

The agency, which contributed to the “F as in Fat Report,” notes that rural America is hit hardest by obesity epidemic and urges country to reverse the trend by 2015

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Washington, DC (August 21, 2008) — With childhood obesity on the rise and increasing at alarming rates in rural America, Save the Children welcomes the latest report by the Trust for America’s Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, *F as in Fat: How Obesity Policies Are Failing in America, 2008*.

The report, issued this week, found that one-third — or an estimated 23 million U.S. children and adolescents — are either obese or at risk of becoming obese.

Save the Children, an international humanitarian agency that has worked in the United States and around the world for more than 75 years, contributed to the report’s first-ever section on obesity in rural areas.

“‘F as in Fat’ shines an important spotlight on the obesity epidemic in America,” said Mark Shriver, vice president and managing director for Save the Children’s U.S. programs. “Childhood obesity rates are now four times higher than they were in 1980. Rural America is hit the hardest, with childhood obesity rates that are 14.5 percent higher than in urban areas.”

Save the Children found that rural children face unique problems that can affect their diet and well-being. Often rural children do not have access to healthy foods, beverages and meals. In more than 800 counties across the country, rural residents live 10 miles or more from a large food retailer, where more plentiful and often fresher food options are available. Compounding the problem, processed foods — rather than fresh produce and lean protein — are cheaper, last longer and are easier to find.

Rural children also lack access and resources for regular physical activity, according to the agency.

Save the Children, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Trust for America’s Health are calling on the federal government to convene government, business, health care and school partners to create and implement a realistic, comprehensive national strategy to

combat childhood obesity — and to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic by the year 2015.

“It is critical that parents, communities and schools receive the assistance they need to provide the healthiest environment possible for their children,” said Shriver. “We are the guardians of our children’s future and must work together to solve this health-care crisis.”

ABOUT SAVE THE CHILDREN’S CHANGE PROGRAM

Save the Children launched the CHANGE (Creating Healthy, Active and Nurturing Growing-up Environments) Program in 2005 to increase rural children’s access to daily physical activity and healthy snacks. CHANGE operates in five rural regions of the United States where poverty rates are highest: Appalachia, the Southeast, the Mississippi River Delta, California’s Central and San Bernardino Valley, and Native American reservations in the Southwest. During the 2007–2008 school year, CHANGE served nearly 7,000 children at 95 sites in 12 states. Save the Children is partnering with The Gerald J. and Dorothy R. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University to conduct a large-scale, community-based study, which is adapting and testing Tufts University’s Shape-Up Somerville model. The research will identify ways to reduce rural children’s obesity risk and create environments that support healthy lifestyle behaviors. Results are expected in 2010.