



CONTACT: Joe Sutherland, Burness Communications
301-652-1558
Prabhu Ponshe, Health Matrix
703-918-4930
202-942-1538 (May 25-27, 2005)
703-615-2466 (cell)

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Editor's Note: The following research will be released at the Society for Prevention Research (www.preventionresearch.org) 2005 annual meeting, May 25-27, 2005, Washington, DC.

TEENAGERS REPORT ON SUCCESS, FAILURE OF ANTI-OBESITY PROGRAMS

Survey reveals teen eating, physical activity habits

- Have programs to change school food choices and PE programs changed teens' attitudes toward healthy eating and physical activity?
- How much do parents talk to teenagers about healthy eating?
- How can children and teenagers be persuaded to reduce the time they spend watching TV and using videogames?

The percentage of overweight adolescents has tripled since 1980, from 5 to 15 percent. The rise is associated with an increase in Type 2 diabetes among teenagers, and overweight teens are likely to be overweight as adults. In response, public health professionals and school officials across the country have advocated taking action by removing junk food from school vending machines and cafeterias, improving physical education programs, and getting kids to spend less time on TV and videogames.

But are all these efforts reaching the teens? At the Society for Prevention Research Annual Meeting in Washington, DC, a group of researchers will present detailed findings from the Healthy Youth Panel Survey (HYPS), a representative national sample of 2,000 teenagers from 12 to 18 years old. The HYPS asked teens about their own weight and weight-loss attempts, their attitudes toward obesity, and what their schools have done to fight obesity on campus.

The first presentation will report on teenagers' attitudes and beliefs about weight gain, how that corresponds to their own reported weight, and whether their parents influence what they eat and whether they are active.

The second presentation will focus on what the teens' schools are doing: what percentage of students report changed food selection in vending machines and cafeterias or new PE programs. It will also report on whether teens that have experienced these changes have changed their own attitudes toward healthy eating and physical activity.

The third presentation will use both the HYPS and a supplementary survey to describe how TV viewing and video-game playing are influenced by parents' rules and attitudes, and availability of media in the home.

Sources: Matthew Farrelly, Ph.D., W. Douglas Evans, Ph.D., James Hersey, Ph.D., RTI International.