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Editor's Note: The following research will be released at the Society for Prevention Research (www.preventionresearch.org) annual meeting, May 31-June 2, 2006, Hyatt Regency, San Antonio, TX.

PREVENTING OBESITY: AT HOME, AT SCHOOL AND IN THE COMMUNITY

Childhood obesity is reaching epidemic proportions globally. In the United States alone, 9 million children are overweight. The epidemic is resulting in the emergence of type 2 diabetes and other chronic diseases as health concerns for youth. Dramatic increases in health care expenditures related to treating overweight and obesity in youth are also likely as a result of childhood obesity. Overweight youth are also more likely to become overweight adults.

- **Can obesity among children be prevented?**
- **What is the role of the family in preventing childhood obesity at home, at school or in the community?**
- **What factors in the school environment can help make a difference?**
- **What do we know about the role of the community in preventing obesity?**
- **How can legislative efforts help to prevent childhood obesity?**

School-based childhood obesity interventions are critical, but if parents are not involved and do not provide healthy environments for their children, the positive influences from school-based work may not be sustained. Unfortunately, data on effective community, school, and family nutrition and physical activity interventions are seriously lacking to date.

One of the presentations at the Society for Prevention Research meeting in San Antonio will focus on the lessons learned regarding parental/family involvement in prevention of obesity. The presentation will also look at home food availability, family dining trends, and television viewing, as well as specific challenges to implementing home-based programs.

At the same time, researchers are developing and testing school-based strategies that aim to effect both individual and environmental change that encourages healthy food choices and promotes physically active lifestyle. Other research is providing insight into social support for healthy eating from significant others that include teachers and parents. New research is also furthering our understanding of ways to intervene with children and adolescents to influence lifelong behavior changes.

Besides schools, programs in other community settings, such as scout troops, after-school settings, and community centers and/or YMCA programs, have been conducted, but reported outcomes have focused on measures of diet and physical activity, rather than obesity.

While many states are currently implementing new laws to address child overweight, the community impact of these policy interventions has not been measured in any scientific studies. Researchers will also present preliminary data on the evaluation of Texas Senate Bill 19 (TEA Education Code 38.013), which mandates regular participation in physical education and the implementation of a coordinated school health program in elementary schools in Texas by the 2006-2007 school year.

Sources: Leslie Lytle PhD, Martha Kubik PhD and Jayne Fulkerson PhD, University of Minnesota; and Deanna Hoelscher PhD, University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston.