



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Alabama after school programs to implement *We Can!* program.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Will your New Year's resolutions help your family live healthier in 2006? The Alabama Department of Public Health can help. The department is kicking off the new year with educational programs in several communities to help children and their parents make healthier food choices, increase physical activity, and reduce time in front of screens, such as television, computer and video games. The programs are part of **W**ays to **E**nhance Children's **A**ctivity & **N**utrition (***We Can!***), a National Institutes of Health program addressing overweight and obesity in youth ages 8-13 years old. Alabama is one of 14 ***We Can!*** intensive community sites nationwide selected to pilot the program.

Through ***We Can!***, Alabama community organizations have access to three tested curricula for youth which incorporate fun, creative nutrition, physical activity, media literacy, and screen-time lessons. A new parents' curriculum also encourages healthy lifestyles for the entire family. The health department provides the Alabama ***We Can!*** sites with free program materials and technical assistance for the youth programs, parent programs, and community events promoting ***We Can!***

The department is offering the community-based programs as part of its Healthy Weight Initiative developed in partnership with the Alabama Department of Education. The MiCasita 21st Century Community Learning Center in DeKalb County is currently participating in the ***We Can!*** program using the Catch Kids Club curriculum in its after-school program. In addition, the following sites are starting programs during January:

- Collinsville 21st Century Community Learning Centers (DeKalb County, Catch Kids Club)
- Opp Middle School - RACE TRAC (Covington County, Media Smart Youth)
- 21st Century Clark Elementary School Learning Center (Dallas County, SMART)

- W. S. Neal Middle School at Project SAFE - Students Aspiring for Excellence (Escambia County, Catch Kids Club)

The department will assess each curriculum's success in improving nutrition and physical activity habits in youth and parent participants in efforts to decrease their risk for being overweight. The health department will continue working with these as well as other sites interested in the **We Can!** program.

Many factors contribute to overweight and obesity. In addition to healthy eating and physical activity, the amount of screen time among children has been linked to overweight and obesity. Furthermore, a report released by the Institute of Medicine in December, "Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity?" shows a strong connection between marketing of foods and beverages and what children ask for and think they want. **We Can!** Media Smart Youth curriculum teaches youth media analysis skills to better understand the connections between media and health.

For more information, please visit the **We Can!** program Web site at <http://wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov>; and the *Alabama Healthy Weight Initiative* and **We Can!** Web site at <http://www.adph.org/WORKSITEWELLNESS> and then clicking on "Healthy Weight Initiative."

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