

STATEWIDE TURNOFF WEEKS RAISE AWARENESS, PROMOTE ACTION

Children and parents learn about healthy alternatives and pledge to “turn off the TV”

Public Health Problem

- Overweight and obesity are strongly associated with ‘screen time,’ which is time spent watching TV, playing video games and using a computer.
- Many parents are unaware of the benefits of decreasing their children’s screen time as recommended by the U. S. Surgeon General and the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- Turnoff Week events raise public awareness about the negative impact of too much television and the healthy alternatives available to all.

Program

- The New York State Department of Health Obesity Prevention Program works with partners to implement annual, state-wide Turnoff Weeks. National expert, Robert Kesten, Executive Director of the Center for SCREEN-TIME Awareness, trained school staff and community partners. Organizer’s kits are provided annually to all who are interested.
- School districts, schools, individual classrooms and community groups offer alternatives to watching TV for children and their parents, including dance-a-thons, game nights, and many other activities. Schools often used student’s own activity ideas and some distributed fun incentives. Many children and parents signed pledges to “turn off the TV.”
- An example from one community: The North Country Healthy Heart Network of Saranac Lake partnered with day care providers in three counties, achieving an unplanned result - the creation of a TV-Viewing Policy for the centers.

Impact

- The annual Turnoff Week is a step toward achieving a national Healthy People 2010 goal to reduce the percentage of adolescents who watch more than two hours of TV a day.
- The New York State Dairy Association now provides physical education equipment to schools in New York City to encourage kids to be active instead of watching TV, as a result of their participation in this initiative.
- Communities reached thousands of children and families and three counties now have a written TV-Viewing Policy for day care centers – important for setting healthy habits early.
- Over half of Turnoff Week activities took place in elementary school grades.
- As trainer Robert Kesten stated about the most recent Turnoff Week, “anecdotal evidence makes it clear that we had a great success...greater awareness of the importance of the activity.... more students and schools in New York sent in posters than the rest of the nation combined...”

Contact

Dan French
New York State Department of Health
518-408-5142
djf05@health.state.ny.us