

## **TRAINING HEAD START WORKERS TO REDUCE PRESCHOOL OBESITY**

*Focus on lifestyle messages promotes healthy weight in a more positive and effective way*

### **Public Health Problem**

- A fourth of low-income preschool children in South Carolina are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight.
- Leaders and staff in Head Start programs noticed that the children served by their programs were also getting heavier and had higher body fat measures.
- Engaging parents of these children in discussions about improving their child's health and weight status was a difficult and uncomfortable task for staff.

### **Program**

- The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control Public Health Region 7 is partnering with Head Start programs in Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester counties to stop or slow the upward trend in body mass index and weight among preschool children.
- With state health department regional funding and federal Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant funds, the 5+-2-1-0 program was added to the existing Color Me Healthy interventions in Head Start centers. Color Me Healthy is a program using fun, interactive learning activities to promote physical activity and healthy eating. The 5+-2-1-0 program encourages lifestyle goals for families that will help all family members achieve and maintain a healthy weight: eat at least five servings or 2-½ cups of vegetables and fruits every day; limit screen time to two hours or less each day; get moving for one hour of physical activity every day and avoiding soda and sugar-sweetened drinks.
- All Head Start staff received training on the basics of childhood obesity, Color Me Healthy and the 5+-2-1-0 messages. Some Head Start staff received training on the additional topic of collecting accurate height and weight data, calculating body mass index and goal setting.
- Six Field Day events were held, reaching sixteen hundred children.

### **Impact**

- A new focus by Head Start caregivers on making healthy choices instead of a child's weight alone has improved the dialogue between parents and Head Start staff, and promotes relationships that help children become healthier.
- Baseline and follow-up measurements on preschoolers are collected by Head Start staff and are now available to health officials for monitoring the health status of children.
- The Color Me Healthy and 5+-2-1-0 programs are reaching 1,600 preschoolers with physical activity and healthy eating messages in all Head Start sites in Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester counties.

### **Contact**

Karen Hill

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control

843-953-4308

[hillke@dhec.sc.gov](mailto:hillke@dhec.sc.gov)