September is Childhood Obesity Awareness Month

The YMCA of Greater Seattle wants families in Washington to understand how adopting healthy habits can help reduce childhood obesity

Seattle, September 01, 2017 – September is Childhood Obesity Awareness Month, and while the dangers of childhood obesity are well chronicled, many families need support changing their families’ habits with the ultimate goal of being a healthy weight. That’s why the YMCA of Greater Seattle — a leading community-based organization dedicated to improving health— wants families to understand the dangers of childhood obesity and ways to reverse course through improved eating habits and increased physical activity.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the prevalence of obesity has remained stable at about 17 percent and affects about 12.7 million children and adolescents. Today, obesity affects one in six children and one in three are overweight, which poses greater risks for many health problems such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and some cancers. Here in Washington, about 25 percent of all children (ages 2-4 receiving WIC services) are considered overweight or obese and about 23 percent of 10th graders in Washington’s public schools were overweight or obese. (Source: Washington State Department of Health).

“Successfully lowering obesity rates in children requires the whole family to change their eating and physical activity habits,” said Brie Davis, Director, Membership and Healthy Living, YMCA of Greater Seattle. “Kids learn unhealthy habits at home, and many parents or caregivers don’t realize how the choices they make affects those who look up to them.”

“Additionally, if families don’t know how to get started, reaching out to your health care provider or organizations like the Y that provide support are great first steps.”

The Y is a leading voice in keeping kids healthy and preventing childhood obesity in Greater Seattle through initiatives like ACT (Actively Changing Together) and Youth Sports programs.

The following tips are some great ways to incorporate healthier eating habits and more physical activity and into your daily family routine:

• **Eat & Drink Healthy:** Make water the drink of choice and encourage everyone to fill half their plates with fruits and vegetables by offering two or three colorful options at every meal. As a family choose a new fruit and veggie every week to taste together. Place a full pitcher of water on the table during meals, and allow children to pour their own water.
• **Play Every Day/Go Outside:** Children should have at least an hour a day of unstructured play outside (when possible) and break a sweat at least three times a week by getting 20 minutes or more of vigorous physical activity. Join your children in games that get your hearts pumping and bodies moving.

• **Get Together:** Eat as a family as frequently as possible. Involve kids in meal planning, preparation and clean up. In addition, adults should take a break from electronics and spend one-to-one time each day with their kids, enjoying one another’s company.

• **Reduce Recreational Screen Time:** Time spent in front of a television, computer, tablet, cell phone or video games should be limited to two hours or less per day. Make a family plan to reduce screen time at home (i.e. turn off screens during meals, go for a walk after a meal, set a timer to remind you to power down the screen).

• **Sleep Well:** Kids and adults need to keep a regular sleep schedule; unwind together in the evenings by reading a book or listening to soft music to ensure the body is preparing for sleep. Kids are growing and need 10-12 hours of healthy sleep per night and seven to eight hours for adults.

In addition to being healthy at home, there is a need to maintain healthy habits while attending out-of-school programs. To create healthy environments for all children the Greater Seattle YMCA is implementing Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Standards in our before and after school programs. Our goal is to make the healthy choice the easy choice for your child while he or she is in our care.

**To foster children’s health, the Y strives to:**

- Provide a fruit and/or vegetable at all meals and snacks.
- Only provide low-fat milk and water as beverages.
- Serve meals and snacks family-style.
- Set limits on screen time.
- Provide daily physical activity (outdoors when possible).
- Promote and support exclusive breastfeeding for infants.
- Adults model healthy food and beverage choices and active play.
- Provide parent/caregiver education to encourage healthy behaviors at home.

To learn more about the YMCA of Greater Seattle’s Childhood Obesity and Healthy Living Programs, please contact Brie Davis Director, Membership and Healthy Living at bdavis@seattleymca.org

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**About the Y**

The Y is one of the nation’s leading nonprofits strengthening communities through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. Across the U.S., 2,700 Ys engage 22 million men, women and children – regardless of age, income or background – to nurture the potential of children and teens, improve the nation’s health and well-being, and provide opportunities to give back and support neighbors. Anchored in more than 10,000 communities, the Y has the long-standing relationships and physical presence not just to promise, but to deliver, lasting personal and social change. ymca.net.