

OPINION

Childhood Obesity: The Holiday Grinch

Sensible solutions begin at home

BY MARC H. MORIAL



As the daylight hours grow shorter and the holiday feasting season kicks-off, I want to take a moment to remind families of the importance of healthy food options and daily physical activity—especially for our children.

Currently, 34 percent of African American children ages 2 to 10 are overweight or obese, compared with 32 percent of all children those same ages. There are serious health implications for obesity in children, including increased risks for developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, orthopedic problems and asthma. If we do not reverse this

trend, today's youth may be the first generation in our history to live sicker lives and die younger than their parent's generation.

There are many complex factors contributing to higher

healthy food options in low-income neighborhoods and a lack of parks, sidewalks and other safe, convenient places for children to play—all contributing to insufficient daily physical activity.

The U.S. Surgeon General recommends that children en-

safe neighborhood recreational facilities and to attract retailers and grocery stores that offer quality, affordable food.

But sensible health care solutions begin in the home. That's why the National Urban League is providing parents and children across the country the information they need to make better choices leading to healthier families.

Through our affiliate network, we are working to educate families about healthy food options and to encourage behavior changes to prevent obesity and diabetes. In 2009, we launched the "I Am Woman" initiative, a six week program designed by Morehouse School of Medicine that educates and empowers women ages 18 and older to serve as community health navigators who help their neighbors learn healthy eating and exercise strategies in order to reach their individual health goals.

Much of this all boils down to good common sense—put down the chips, turn off the Xbox, the iPod and the smart phone and move.

All parents want to see their children lead happy, healthy, productive lives free of obesity-related health complications. Beating back the obesity epidemic is also important to our nation's future. With so many challenges facing us -- from winning the war on terrorism to expanding economic opportunity -- we must make sure the next generation is fit to lead, body, mind and soul. Empowering our children to eat healthier and exercise more will keep the obesity Grinch away. That is the best holiday gift of all.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

Policy and community leaders must also make the necessary investments to provide safe neighborhood recreational facilities and to attract retailers and grocery stores that offer quality, affordable food.

overweight and obesity rates among children. These include difficulty in obtaining affordable,

gauge in at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week. Yet, according to 2006 estimates, nearly two-thirds of adolescents do not meet these recommendations. African American females reported the lowest levels of physical activity—79 percent do not meet the guidelines.

There is an urgent need for more physical education in our schools. Policy and community leaders must also make the necessary investments to provide

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