

# Fit WIC Initiative



As health and nutrition professionals nationwide are aware, overweight and obesity are increasing at an alarming rate. It is especially troubling when weight problems are seen among young children. Unless this problem is addressed early on, it is projected that overweight children will continue on to become overweight adults. It is projected that the life expectancy and the quality of life will be shorter than that of their parents, due to the associated health problems of overweight and obesity. Recent developments highlight the call to action in finding a solution to this health problem. Michelle Obama's Let's Move! campaign focuses on solving the obesity crisis within the next generation. The New Hampshire WIC Nutrition Program received funding for a USDA Special Project Grant for 2006-2009 that provided a positive initiative to address this health problem. NH Fit WIC is one example of what can be done with young children to keep them healthy. NH Fit WIC is about movement for children and their parents and is exemplified by the theme "play every day!"

In 2006, the CDC Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance System (PedNSS) data revealed the necessity for this program. For NH WIC participants two years of age and older:

- 18.1% were overweight and 15.9% were obese.
- In the Latino population, 18.3% were overweight and 20.3 % obese (2005 data).

Overweight as defined  $\geq 85^{\text{th}}$  and  $< 95^{\text{th}}$  percentile Body Mass Index for age (BMI); obese as  $\geq 95^{\text{th}}$  percentile BMI for age.

For NH WIC children two years of age and older, one of every three are overweight or obese. For our Latino children it is worse, approximately four of every ten, are overweight or obese.

In the last 20 years, the number of overweight children in the New Hampshire WIC Program has shown a steady increase. In 1986, the rate of obesity was 7.2%; the rate doubled to 15.9% in 2006. Progress is being made, as the 2009 NH PedNSS data shows for children 2 years and older, a rate of 17.8 % overweight and 14.4% obese. For the first time in many years the NH WIC obesity level is below the national average of 14.8%.

## What is Fit WIC?

Fit WIC is an initiative to increase the physical activity of preschoolers every day, by providing age-appropriate physical play ideas and activities. It does this by providing parents with ideas and tools to empower them to succeed in this endeavor. Children need daily opportunities for free, unstructured play, as well as time for structured, skill building play, like throwing and catching. Fit WIC promotes the parent as their child's most important teacher.



To support parents' efforts, Fit-N-Fun playgroups for 3- to 4-year-old children and their parents were held in WIC clinics. The Fit WIC Parent's Activities Book and Kit was provided to all families with 3- to 4-year-old children participating in WIC, regardless of their weight status. The Fit WIC Parent's Activities Book and Kit provided easy, age-appropriate activities to increase a preschooler's play and to develop their physical skills. The activity book also offered solutions to common barriers to physical play as identified by parents. Fit WIC offered WIC staff and parents a positive approach to prevent childhood overweight, and to set the stage for healthy habits that can lead to a lifetime of healthy living. In 2009, a Spanish version of the Fit WIC Activities Book called "Actividades WIC Para Estar En Forma" and Kit was developed for NH WIC Latino families.

## Where did Fit WIC happen in New Hampshire and what were the results?

Five NH WIC agencies were part of the Fit WIC initiative:

- Community Action Program Belknap- Merrimack Counties WIC Program
- Coos County Family Health Services WIC Program
- Ammonoosuc Community Health Services WIC Program
- Rockingham Community Action WIC Program
- Southern NH Services WIC Program

Positive results were demonstrated in the final analysis. Qualitative analysis showed strong positive response to the Fit WIC Activities Book and Kit. Quantitative analysis showed statistically significant effects of the intervention on parents teaching their child physical play skills. The main finding was that “the Fit WIC Parent’s Activities Book and Kit is most effective at positively affecting program participants if they are motivated to use it.” The more often a respondent reported using the Fit WIC Parent’s Activities Book and Kit, the more likely they engaged in positive behaviors and benefited from the program. Four of the participating WIC agencies have acquired funding or are in the process of applying for funds to continue this project for their WIC families with preschool age children.

From a Fit WIC Parent:

*“I enjoy the Fit WIC program. It gave me a lot more ideas for activities. It completely changed my daughter’s TV viewing time and created more active time for her. It also gave me more push to include myself in her activities. Thank you.”*

From a Local Agency WIC Director:

*“Since the start of Fit WIC we have received positive feedback from parents about this project and support from them in our efforts to increase physical activity and reduce childhood obesity. Parents have provided positive comments about the wonderful resource book with low-cost ideas for improving their child’s level of physical activity.”*

**To learn more about the NH Fit WIC project, contact Frances McLaughlin at [fmclaughlin@dhhs.state.nh.us](mailto:fmclaughlin@dhhs.state.nh.us) or 603-271-4546 at the NH Department of Health and Human Services’ WIC Nutrition Program.**



### References:

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009 Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance, NH Tables. Table 2C, Table 8C, Table 12 C, 2009.

WIC Works Resource System, <http://wicworks.nal.usda.gov> Search-Fit WIC