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Press Release

HHS Launches New Campaign to Encourage Physical Activity and Healthy Behaviors for Kids

"VERB: It's What You Do" Aims to Spark "Activity Movement" Among Kids

HHS Secretary Tommy G. Thompson today announced the launch of a national \$190 million multicultural media campaign designed to promote a healthier lifestyle for kids. The "VERB: It's What You Do" Youth Media Campaign (YMC) will use television, radio spots and the Internet to reach youth all across the country.

"Our goal is for the VERB campaign to motivate and inspire our children to get active and involved -- and to have fun doing so," Secretary Thompson said. "Too many of our children are sitting around, and their inactivity is leading to serious health problems such as overweight, obesity, and diabetes. Our kids need to be kids and be active. We need to get our children away from the Play Station and onto the playground. By doing so, our children will live healthier and grow into stronger adults."

HHS' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is managing the department's effort for the YMC. The campaign encourages 9-13 year olds, known in marketing terms as "tweens" to find a VERB (such as run, paint, sing, bowl, etc.) or several VERBs that fit their personality and interests. The campaign then encourages tweens to use "their VERB" as a launching pad to become active and involved and to make regular physical activity and healthy behaviors a lifetime pursuit.

The campaign also addresses the multitude of entertainment choices available to kids today -- such as video games, Internet surfing, and television -- and offers them better alternatives. Currently, tweens spend an average of four and a



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half hours each day in front of a variety of screens: including television, video games and computers.

In April, Secretary Thompson launched his national Prevention Initiative to improve the health of all Americans. "The long-standing goals to eat right and exercise regularly remain sound," Secretary Thompson said. "What we need, however, is a fresh approach to good health. We need to make it fun and achievable. We need to stop the guilt-ridden lectures and start showing adults and children the enjoyable and doable steps they can take to better health. That's what 'VERB' does-- it lets kids decide what positive activity they want to do and encourages them to do it."

Children who are engaged in positive activities are better able to meet the demands of daily physical activity, gain greater self-esteem, confidence and discipline, school achievement, social connectedness and positive family relationships than their sedentary peers.

The primary goal of the "VERB: It's What You Do" campaign is to reduce the proportion of children and adolescents who are overweight. Consider the evidence about the growing ill health of American kids:

- In 1999, 13 percent of children and adolescents were overweight. The number of adolescents overweight has tripled since 1980.
- Type 2 diabetes, unheard of in young people 10 to 15 years ago, is increasing dramatically across the United States among adolescents.
- One-fourth of children in America spend four hours or more watching television daily and only 27 percent of students in grades 9 through 12 engage in moderate physical activity at least 30 minutes a day on five or more days of the week.
- Three-quarters of overweight and obese tweens do not change their habits and remain overweight and obese in adulthood.
- Obesity and overweight has been linked to increased risks of cancer, heart disease, stroke and diabetes among adults.

The campaign will focus on getting children excited about increasing the amount of physical and "prosocial" activity in their lives, while helping parents, coaches and teachers see the importance of physical and prosocial activity to the overall health of tweens. Prosocial activity is defined by the campaign as getting kids involved with positive organizations or groups, such as school clubs, community groups or religious organizations.

"The 'VERB: It's What You Do' campaign gives kids concrete examples of how to get active in a fun, cool and meaningful way," CDC Director Dr. Julie Gerberding said. "And it will also

give kids role models, such as famous athletes or musicians or dancers, who they can look up to and see firsthand the positive benefits of physical and prosocial activity."

In late June, television programs, radio stations, and Web sites carried the first advertisements of the VERB campaign. The campaign will continue to expand over the coming months with additional activities and events coming at the beginning of the school year. The VERB Web site, <http://www.verbnow.com>, offers many interactive features that will help tweens get active. It also offers fun games, interesting facts, and will serve as an outlet for a grant program that will help tweens fund their plans for physical and prosocial activity.

The integrated "VERB: It's What You Do" campaign utilizes advertising, marketing, events and communications activities to ensure that campaign messages reach kids whenever they are looking for something positive to do. Through multicultural media partnerships, the campaign is designed to reach children in different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds - including specific outreach for Hispanics, African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders.

So far, the campaign has received \$72 million in added value and bonus activity from its media partners, including custom programming and events. To date there are agreements with DC Comics, AOL Time Warner, Disney, Primedia, Viacom and even a group of celebrity endorsers, including rapper and actor Bow Wow.

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