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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HEALTHY CHOICES FOR A “FAMILY FIT LIFESTYLE”

January is “Family Fit Lifestyle” month, but as the Director of the Washington County Health Department I want to remind everyone that anytime is the right time to think and act on healthy choices for you and your family. The website www.cdc.gov has a wealth of information related to health promotion and prevention. I strongly recommend anyone interested in health and fitness to look at the winnable battles section which describes public health priorities where significant progress can be made in a relatively short timeframe – generally within one to four years.

Obesity, which often has poor nutrition and lack of physical activity as underlying causes, has been identified in the Washington County Community Health Improvement Plan for 2011-2015 as an area needing work to improve the community’s health. Survey results of 400 adults from Washington County in years 2006 and 2010 show that there has been a statistical increase in the overall percent of respondents who reported overweight, obesity and lack of physical activity or unhealthy food choices as one of the top three community health concerns. The local plan and community goals were adapted from one of the CDC’s Winnable Battle Initiatives.

Community Goals adapted from the CDC Winnable Battle Initiative include:

- Improve dietary quality
 - Increase fruit and vegetable intake
 - Decrease intake of high-energy, low-nutrient foods
 - Reduce consumption of sugary drinks
 - Reduce sodium in the food supply
- Increase breastfeeding
- Increase physical activity
- Prevent micronutrient malnutrition
- Enhance state and community capacity to improve population-level health

Winnable Battles are public health priorities with large-scale impact on health and with known, effective strategies to address them. If you can, please take the time to watch the video concerning obesity at www.cdc.gov/winnablebattles/101/Nutrition/index.html - it is only 6 minutes long and very interesting.

Obesity increases the risk of many health conditions, including the following:

- Coronary heart disease, stroke, and high blood pressure.
- Type 2 diabetes.
- Cancers, such as endometrial, breast, and colon cancer.

- High total cholesterol or high levels of triglycerides.
- Liver and gallbladder disease.
- Sleep apnea and respiratory problems.
- Degeneration of cartilage and underlying bone within a joint (osteoarthritis).
- Reproductive health complications such as infertility.
- Mental health conditions.

Obesity is costly and in 2008, overall medical care costs related to obesity for U.S. adults were estimated to be as high as \$147 billion. People who were obese had medical costs that were \$1,429 higher than the cost for people of normal body weight. Obesity also has been linked with reduced worker productivity and chronic absence from work.

The causes of obesity in the United States are complex and numerous, and they occur at social, economic, environmental, and individual levels. American society has become characterized by environments that promote physical inactivity and increased consumption of less healthy food. Public health approaches that can reach large numbers of people in multiple settings—such as in child care facilities, workplaces, schools, communities, and health care facilities—are needed to help people make healthier choices.

Policy and environmental approaches that make healthy choices available, affordable, and easy can be used to extend the reach of strategies designed to raise awareness and support people who would like to make healthy lifestyle changes. The current Winnable Battles have been chosen based on the magnitude of the health problems and our ability to make significant progress in improving outcomes. By identifying priority strategies and clear targets, we can make significant progress in reducing health disparities and the overall health burden from these diseases and conditions.

Overweight and obesity are among the most urgent health challenges facing our families today. More than a third of adults in the U.S. – over 72 million people – and 17% of children in the U.S. are obese. From 1980 to 2000, obesity rates for adults doubled and rates for children tripled.

The CDC has identified obesity, nutrition, and physical activity as winnable battles that can have measurable affects within a few years. Locally a group called the Healthy People Project of Washington County (HPPWC) has been working in collaboration with the Washington County Health Department and the Kettle Moraine Y to promote increased physical activity and access to healthy foods since 2006. On a national level First Lady Michelle Obama has launched a nutrition campaign aimed at improving the health of children. The state of Wisconsin has an obesity plan. It will take everyone working together to win the battle.

Please check out www.getmovingwashingtoncounty.com a website that identifies free Washington County recreational resources. It also includes information on the numerous community groups and organizations that support its mission to implement proven strategies to improve nutrition and increase fruit and vegetable consumption, increase the amount of physical activity, and improve the overall health of Washington County residents.

I suggest this January that we each make some common sense changes that will improve our own health. Increase your activity level slowly. Look for ways to take a few extra steps. Support schools and worksites that are trying to promote wellness. Take a walk. Get more sleep. Use alcohol in moderation. Stop using tobacco products. Eat more fruits and vegetables. Reduce consumption of sugary drinks. Take advantage of the great Farmer's Markets in Washington County during the summer months. Decrease intake of high-energy, low-nutrient foods. Support breastfeeding initiatives. Get involved and support policies that encourage and enable healthy fit lifestyles. Stay informed and be aware of the importance of health throughout every stage and age of a lifetime. Let's make every month about Family Fit Lifestyles.