

Contact: Joni Whitehouse, Assistant Director/Deputy Health Officer Washington County Health Department (WCHD) AND
Co-Chair of Healthy People Project of Washington County (HPP-WC)
Phone: 262-335-4462
Email: Joni.Whitehouse@co.washington.wi.us

For Immediate Release

**Washington County Families Unplug!
Screen Free Week Turns Attention to Physical Activity**

Washington County, Wis. (April 30, 2012) – Families across Wisconsin and the nation will pull the plug on TVs, computers and digital devices during Screen Free Week, April 30-May 6.

Research shows a lifestyle of TV and computer use among kids has negative effects on physical health and school performance. Screen time for children under 3 is linked to irregular sleep patterns and delayed language development in addition to lower school achievement and an increased risk of obesity.

“According to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) (<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/obesity/facts.htm>), the number of children and adolescents battling weight problems has tripled over the past 30 years. In the past, children more likely had activity like walking to school built into their daily schedules. Turning off the screens for a week may encourage families to explore other options including walking, biking and playing outdoors,” said Joni Whitehouse, Deputy Health Officer of Washington County and co-chair of the Healthy People Project of Washington County.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screen time for children under 2 and less than 2 hours per day for older children, yet the average 8-18-year-old spends upwards of 7 hours per day in front of a TV or computer, according to a Kaiser Family Foundation study.

It may be surprising to learn that 40% of 3-month-old babies are regular viewers of screen media, and 19% of babies 1 year and under have a TV in their bedroom. Pre-schoolers may also be exposed to TVs and computers in child care settings.

Whitehouse noted that increased screen time is a recognized contributor to weight gain in children and adults alike. Chronic diseases and conditions associated with excess weight are an ongoing problem in the county. These are priorities in the Community Health Improvement Plan (www.co.washington.wi.us/chn).

To address screen time overload for children of all ages, adults can:

- Keep TVs and computers out of children’s bedrooms
- Eat meals around the table rather than around the TV
- Set screen time limits that are age appropriate
- Suggest other developmentally appropriate activities for young children
- Set a good example by limiting their own screen time
- Embrace play and physical activity as a way to build relationships between children and adults

For information about going screen free, visit www.screenfreeweek.org. For good ideas of free and low cost recreational opportunities, check out the local interactive website, www.getmovingwashingtoncounty.com.

Then power down the computer, turn off the TV, go outside and play!.

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