



SURGEON GENERAL, STATE OF ARKANSAS
JOSEPH W. THOMPSON, MD, MPH

Welcome to a very comprehensive guide to child health. I applaud your dedication in using this guide to improve the health of the children under your care.

You will find useful, important information throughout this guide, but I ask that you pay close attention to the section on nutrition and physical activity. With 33 percent of Arkansas children overweight or obese by the time they reach kindergarten, we must start early to reverse this deadly epidemic. Obesity is a top contributor to serious diseases like hypertension, diabetes, heart disease and others that rob Arkansas citizens of their ability to lead healthy, productive lives. It is one of the most dangerous health issues we face today.

At the simplest level, preventing obesity is about balancing the energy taken in through food and beverage with the energy expended through physical activity. Replace sugar-sweetened beverages with low fat milk or water. Provide well-balanced meals and healthy snacks in age-appropriate portions sizes as described in this guide. Reduce screen time and help children have fun with plenty of vigorous physical activity.

Because childhood obesity is so prevalent these days it is sometimes difficult for parents to recognize when a child's weight becomes unhealthy. Maintaining a consistent relationship with a medical home as described in Chapter One will allow your child's doctor to help you monitor your child's weight and general health, including making sure your child receives the shots needed to avoid illness.

Many researchers and health professionals agree that if we don't reverse the obesity epidemic, the current generation of young people could be the first in U.S. history to live sicker and die younger than their parents' generation. What you do today will help keep this from happening tomorrow.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Thompson".

Joseph W. Thompson, MD, MPH
Arkansas Surgeon General
Director, Arkansas Center for Health Improvement

