

"Raising Fit Kids" National Study Reveals Weight a More Difficult Talk Than Sex, Drugs Between Parents and Teens

Maintaining Healthy Weight Is Most Important Health Conversation Parents Should Have With Kids, According to Healthcare Professionals

NEW YORK, NY -- (MARKET WIRE) -- 10/05/11 -- "The Talk," that first awkward conversation between parents and kids about sex, drugs or alcohol appears to have met its match. New research released today from a national "Raising Fit Kids" study reveals that being overweight is a more difficult topic for parents to talk to their teens about than the traditionally touchy subjects of drugs, alcohol, smoking and even sex.

The research was conducted as part of *fit*, a partnership between WebMD and Sanford Health, to deliver specialized children's health, nutrition and wellness resources to consumers and healthcare professionals.

The study finds that, while around one in 20 parents of teens report struggling with the subjects of alcohol, drugs and smoking, and about one in 10 are uncomfortable talking with their teens about sex, far more -- nearly a quarter of parents -- are hesitant to talk to their teens about being overweight.

What's even more concerning is that, according to the research, many parents (of kids ages 8-17) may be avoiding the subject of weight altogether.

More than one in five parents admit they have never brought up the subject of maintaining a healthy weight to their kids, despite more than one-third say that being overweight poses an immediate health risk to their kids. According to the American Heart Association, about one in three American kids and teens are overweight or obese.

"Maintaining a healthy weight has become a cultural -- and now clearly a conversational -- lightning rod," said Hansa Bhargava, M.D., Medical Director, *fit*. "The irony is that, in a culture almost obsessed with finding solutions to surging childhood obesity rates, something as simple as talking to your kids about healthy habits and, thus, healthy weight, poses perhaps the greatest challenge to parents."

Healthcare professionals are clear on their viewpoint: 90 percent believe that maintaining a healthy weight is the most important health topic that parents should discuss with their children, over safe sex, cigarette smoking, drug use, and excessive alcohol consumption.

Whose Job Is It Anyway? Parents and Kids Disagree; Physicians Fear the Fallout

Almost no parents feel that doctors should be primarily responsible for teaching their kids about the risks of smoking cigarettes, sexual activity, drugs or alcohol. However, when it comes to the dangers of being overweight, nearly one in five parents say the doctor should be most accountable for having this discussion.

"Weight has become such an emotionally charged and pervasive subject, especially in a culture that is highly image-driven," says Susan Bartell, Psy.D., nationally recognized obesity expert. "Broaching this subject can be extremely intimidating for parents, especially given that parents themselves may be struggling with weight."

When healthcare providers are confronted with conversations with their pediatric patients on weight, however, they too face their own barriers. According to the research, more than half say the potential emotional reaction from pediatric patients prevents them from initiating the conversation about healthy weight; the same percentage report concerns about the emotional fallout from family members.

Of the healthcare providers who are talking to their pediatric patients about the importance of maintaining a healthy weight, only 47 percent have the conversation with patients whose weight is within normal range, versus 93 percent who have the conversation with patients whose weight is above the normal range. Prevention is key in this epidemic, but it is not necessarily happening in the doctor's office.

Parents May Not Be Prepared to Have "The Talk"

One of the biggest barriers to parents talking with their kids and teaching healthy habits is simply not having the right information. According to the research, well over half of clinicians believe parents need information on how to manage these conversations effectively. "Initiating these discussions starts with knowing the basics, like the fact that behavioral health and proper sleep play a critical role in obesity risk, in addition to proper nutrition and activity," says Mike Bergeron, Ph.D. "Equally important is providing the resources that kids can use on their own, that enable them to learn and interact in ways that they find engaging."

Fit: A Nationwide Initiative with a New Platform

WebMD and Sanford Health, the nation's largest rural, not-for-profit, health system, recently joined together to embark on *fit* (www.fit.webmd.com), a new national initiative aimed at promoting health and wellness and preventing childhood obesity among kids ages 2-18.

Fit is the only national initiative that focuses equally on the four key contributing factors to childhood obesity risk: Food (nutritional fitness); Move (physical fitness); Mood (emotional fitness); and Recharge (restorative fitness). It is WebMD's first initiative solely devoted to children's health and based on the latest scientific and behavioral research on childhood obesity risk.

Fit is backed by the clinical insight of Sanford Health and WebMD's trusted health information and comes to life through websites developed for kids, parents and clinicians.

Fit includes online destinations for kids and teens, as well as Raising Fit Kids for parents (www.webmd.com/raisingfitkids). It features content for all ages, including games, quizzes, articles, videos and other content for kids developed by WebMD's digital content team.

Media: Please visit the *Fit* media room or online press kit for broadcast and print materials at <http://www.fitmediaroom.com> or <http://newsinfusion.com/events/webmdfit>.

About the Surveys

Data was collected from multiple sources: a national survey of 1,299 parents of children ages 8-17 and a national survey of 1,078 kids between the ages of 8-17 conducted by Kelton Research; and a survey of 624 healthcare providers including pediatricians, nurse practitioners and physician assistants conducted via Medscape, the leading source of information for healthcare professionals.

About Sanford Health

Sanford Health is an integrated health system headquartered in Fargo, ND and Sioux Falls, SD and consists of two long-standing organizations that merged in 2009. Sanford is now the largest, rural, not-for-profit health care system in the nation with locations in 112 communities in seven states. In addition, Sanford Health is in the process of developing international clinics in Ireland, Africa, Israel and Mexico.

Sanford Health includes 34 hospitals, 116 clinic locations and more than 900 physicians in 70 specialty areas of medicine. With more than 20,000 employees, Sanford Health is the largest employer in North and South Dakota. The system is experiencing dynamic growth and development in conjunction with Denny Sanford's \$400 million gift in 2007, the largest gift ever to a health care organization in America. This gift is making possible the implementation of the several initiatives including global children's clinics, multiple research centers and finding a cure for type 1 diabetes. For more information, visit sanfordhealth.org.

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LauraLee Harding

lharding@coynepr.com

973-588-2000

201-679-4042

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