



Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth (VFHY)

Promising Practices to Reduce and Prevent Childhood Obesity Framework (2022)

Healthy Communities Action Teams (HCATs) work in collaboration with their communities to drive **policy**, **systems** and **environmental** (PSE) changes that support **eight** healthy behaviors which can prevent and reduce childhood obesity.

This framework provides examples of strategies and activities that you might adapt. You know your community best, and this list is not exhaustive.



Breastfeeding



Eating More Fruits & Veggies



Reducing Consumption of Energy-Dense Foods



Moving More



Decreasing Screen Time



Getting Enough Sleep



Reducing Stress With Increased Mindfulness



Decreasing Consumption of Sugar-Sweetened Beverages

1

Breastfeeding

Among breastfeeding's many health benefits is that it reduces a baby's risk for obesity by 15 to 30%. Each month of breastfeeding results in a 4% reduction in obesity risk. Part of this reduction is related to the self-regulation learned by infants who nurse at the breast as opposed to receiving pumped breast milk in a bottle. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life and breastfeeding with complementary foods until at least 1 year of age.

Statewide Indicator: Percentage of Virginia infants who are breastfed exclusively through six months of age.
2019: 25.8% of mothers have breastfed exclusively for at least six months.

Possible Strategies and Activities

P

Institute a formal, written policy at an organization providing the right to private space to breastfeed or express milk along with the ability to appropriately store milk.

S

Develop and implement supportive lactation procedures at worksites.

E

Establish designated private space to breastfeed or express milk. The room should not be a restroom and should have an outlet.

E

Assist facilities/communities in achieving a "[Baby-Friendly Hospital](#)" designation by Baby-Friendly USA, Inc., a [Virginia Workplace Breastfeeding-Friendly Recognition Award](#), or a [Breastfeeding Family Friendly Community designation](#).

2

Eating More Fruits and Veggies

Eating fresh fruits and vegetables helps maintain a healthy body weight and promotes longevity because these foods are high in vitamins and low in calories. We recommend focusing on improving fruit and vegetable intake by addressing behaviors and structural factors (physical environment, food systems, etc.) that can either enhance access to or be a barrier to fruit and vegetable consumption.

Statewide Indicator: Percentage of high school youth who ate vegetables one or more times during the past 7 days.
2019: 86.1% of high school youth

Possible Strategies and Activities

Partner with local farmers' markets, farm stands, mobile markets, etc. to begin accepting SNAP and other financial incentive initiatives.

S

- [Virginia EBT Manual for Farmers Markets](#)
- [Virginia Fresh Match](#) (VFM)
- [Virginia Grown Resources](#)

S	Work with local farmers' markets to remove barriers to accepting SNAP. Recruit local community members to promote these opportunities in order to attract and retain SNAP customers.
E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcoming barriers to accept SNAP at Markets • Virginia Farmers Market Association: VFM Programming
S	<p>Establish farm-to-institution initiatives (e.g. farm-to-preschool, farm-to-school) through partnership with local school districts and childcare providers. Consider participating in Virginia-based programs like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virginia's Harvest of the Month • Virginia Farm to CACFP Program • Virginia's Farm to School Network
S	<p>Develop partnerships between local school districts' career and technical education programs and school nutrition programs in order to build career and technical tracks related to agricultural production.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example: Giles County, VA
S	<p>Through coalitions or community partnerships, build relationships and buy-in between local producers, school divisions, and school or child nutrition programs in order to improve access to healthy foods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples: Petersburg Healthy Options Partnerships, Williamsburg SHIP, Fauquier Fresh
S	<p>Create school-based youth leadership programming that connects growing food with leadership skills such as: program planning, decision-making, public speaking, advocacy, healthy meal changes, farming practices, and more.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virginia example and HCAT grantees: Cultivate Charlottesville City School Yard Garden & Projects GROWS
E	<p>Improve access to retail stores and other distribution outlets (e.g. farmers' markets) that sell or provide high-quality, affordable fruits and vegetables by addressing food environment barriers that can be burdensome for consumers (e.g. Meals on Wheels, ride sharing programs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barriers to Healthy Eating for Rural Communities
S	<p>Increase the number of child serving institutions participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and the Summer Food Service Program to support serving healthy foods and beverages in after-school programs, childcare facilities and recreation centers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associations between CACFP and healthy foods in ECE
S	<p>Improve public transportation to food stores through partnerships with transportation providers or influencing business owners to provide transportation for customers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Security and Transportation Improvements • Ready To Go Van example
S	<p>Provide trauma-informed nutrition education for populations at high risk of experiencing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma Informed Nutrition Programming • Trauma, Resilience, & Nourishment

Create or support an existing [Food Policy Council](#). Consider effective [strategies](#) and the following priority categories:

- Food procurement (e.g. school breakfast and lunch programs, farm to school, institution or hospital)
- Food waste reduction and recovery
- Anti-hunger (e.g. SNAP and [Child and Adult Care Food Program](#) (CACFP) outreach and enrollment, food banks, summer feeding)
- Land use planning (e.g. urban agriculture zoning, farm land protection)
- Food production (e.g. farming, aquaculture, gardening, beekeeping)
- Natural resources and environment (e.g. water, soil quality, pesticide regulation)
- Economic development (e.g. food hubs, local food business promotion)
- Transportation (e.g. access to health food retail, last mile food distribution from wholesale suppliers to consumer food retailers)

3

Reducing Consumption of Energy-Dense Foods

Energy-dense foods contain many calories for a small volume of food. The calories in these foods come mostly from fat and sugar. Increased portion sizes, especially for soda, fruit drinks, desserts, french fries, burgers, pizzas, and others, have contributed to increased calorie intake leading to obesity. By choosing foods that are low in calories, but high in volume, like fruits and vegetables, individuals can eat more and feel fuller on fewer calories.

Statewide Indicator: Percentage of high school youth who **did not** eat at least one meal or snack from a fast food restaurant (such as McDonald's, Taco Bell, KFC, or convenience stores) during the past 7 days.

2019: 24.2% of high school youth

Possible Strategies and Activities

Eliminate advertising and marketing of these products near school grounds and public places frequented by youth by implementing local policies and ordinances to discourage the consumption of unhealthy foods. Implement school wellness policies and childcare policies that limit exposure to low quality foods (e.g. healthy food fundraising) and establish norms that celebrate high quality foods.

- [VDOE Model Local School Wellness Policy Guidance Document](#) (See page 9)
- [Alliance for Healthier Generation](#)
- [Restricting Food Marketing in Schools](#)
- [Zoning regulations for fast food](#)
- [More research on food marketing](#)

Work with local government agencies and food advocacy organizations to implement zoning, ordinances, and other regulations that enhance access to high quality, nutritious foods, and limit access to low quality or nutrient poor foods. Support existing programming by expanding their reach in localities, such as Virginia Fresh Match, and CACFP.

- [Municipal Strategies for Healthy Food Access](#)

4

Moving More

People who exercise regularly think clearer, sleep better, have better mental health, and reduce their risk of heart disease, diabetes, arthritis pain, some cancers and obesity. Children and adolescents should get at least an hour per day of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity. The [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#) provides detailed recommendations for the amount and type of physical activity. Some physical activity is better than none, more is better in most circumstances.

Statewide Indicator: Percentage of high school youth who were physically active at least 60 minutes per day on 5 or more days (in any kind of physical activity that increased their heart rate and made them breathe hard some of the time) during the past 7 days.

2019: 41.4% of high school youth

Possible Strategies and Activities

E Promote recreational physical activity through community-wide media campaigns that highlight local programs, events and other resources like public walking trails and school facilities that can be used by community residents.

P Implement policies and practices that build physical activity into daily routines including regulatory policies mandating minimum play space, physical equipment and duration for play in preschool, after-school, and childcare programs.

S

- [Get Kids Moving Resources](#)

P Implement school wellness policies that ensure P.E. programs provide 150 minutes per week for elementary school students and 225 minutes for middle/high school students.

S

- [Quality PE Programs](#)

E Support multiple forms of recreational physical activity by increasing access to parks that are safe, attractive, and near residential areas and expanding youth athletic leagues, with emphasis on income and gender equity.

S Establish shared use agreements with schools/rec centers allowing playing fields, playgrounds and rec centers to be used in off hours.

S

- [Joint Use Agreement Strategies](#) (see CDC call-out to Fairfax, VA success story!)

E Establish or improve youth sports or play area (playground, soccer field, basketball court, etc.) or programming that enhances physical activities.

P Promote destination walking through the implementation of zoning regulations and roadway design standards that co-locate residential, commercial and school properties (e.g. mixed land-use zoning and transit-oriented development).

S

- [Mixed used development outcomes](#)
- [CDC Active Communities Tool](#) (ACT)
- [ACT Planning Guide](#)

E Partner with local planning departments to support active transport in city/town planning strategies. This may include urban-design elements and land-use policies. Examples include:

S

- Plan, build and maintain a [network of sidewalks and street crossings](#) that creates a safe environment connecting schools, parks, etc.
- Use [Complete Street](#) standards that encourage walking and bicycling through built environment improvement.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing neighborhood walkability and bikeability, VDOT Biking and Walking and Bicycling Resources for Virginia.
S	Improve access to recreational facilities through reduced costs, increased operating hours, and culturally appropriate activities.
S	Implement a Safe Routes to Schools or Walking School Bus program to encourage children to safely walk/bicycle to schools.
E	Remove barriers to physical activity by improving access to bicycles, helmets and related equipment for families through subsidies or repair programs and/or placement of bicycle racks on buses, and providing incentives to car or van pool.
S	Provide trauma informed physical activity programming for populations at high risk of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trauma Informed Approach makes Physical Activity More Accessible Prescription for Nature Program

5 Decreasing Screen Time

Screen time refers to use of television, computers, tablets, and cell phones outside of educational purposes. Media usage, particularly television, has been associated with a higher risk for obesity. The American Academy of Pediatrics discourages **any** screen time for children under 2 years of age and recommends no more than 2 hours of screen time for children aged 2 years and older. The AAP also discourages parents from placing a television in a child's room.

Statewide Indicator: Percentage of high school youth who **did not** play video or computer games or use a computer 3 or more hours per day (counting time spent on things such as Xbox, PlayStation, an iPad or other tablet, a smartphone, texting, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, or other social media, for something that was not school work) on an average school day.

2019: 55.2% of high school youth

Possible Strategies and Activities

P	Implement policies that reduce sedentary screen time in preschool and after-school programs. Collaborate with these settings to encourage children to spend leisure time engaged in non-structured play, board games or reading. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Screen Time Reduction Toolkit (See Page 8)
S	Develop/provide alternative forms of activity that are age appropriate for children ages 0-18 that promote physical activity and/or creative skills development. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> WHO Guidelines on Sedentary Behavior & Sleep (for children under 5) Screen Time Reduction Toolkit

6

Getting Enough Sleep

Mounting evidence suggests that people who get too little sleep have a higher risk of weight gain and obesity than people who get their recommended hours of sleep. This is true for both children and adults, though children appear to be at greater risk than adults, and African Americans are at the greatest risk. Short sleep time impacts appetite control and makes you drowsy during the day and less likely to be physically active. Sleep restores your energy and is important to balancing psychological, emotional, and physical health.

Statewide Indicator: Percentage of high school youth who got 8 or more hours of sleep (on an average school night).
2019: 25.4% of high school youth

Possible Strategies and Activities

Ensure that childcare providing institutions prioritize peaceful rest times which include but are not limited to: having designated cot or mats for sleeping, keeping children's faces three feet apart or separated by a solid barrier, playing soothing music, quietly reading a story, and avoiding sugary food and beverage intake.

S

- [Nap frequency associations with cognitive, behavioral, metabolic outcomes](#)
- [Safe Sleep for Preschool Age Children](#)

P

Work with school systems to implement age-appropriate school start time policies.

7

Reducing Stress with Increased Mindfulness

High and prolonged stress levels have been linked to obesity. Common techniques to reduce stress are keeping a healthy diet, being physically active, and overall staying mindful by being aware of oneself in the present – including awareness of your behavior and environment. One of the most effective ways to be mindful is meditation. Meditation has been shown to reduce cortisol (the body's primary stress hormone), blood pressure, and heart rate. Reduction of these physiological measures can reduce illness, leading to a healthier life. A body of mindfulness research supports its use for changing obesity-related eating behaviors.

Possible Strategies and Activities

Provide programming for, or connect child-serving institutions to, mindfulness-based programming that is age and culturally appropriate for youth who are adversely affected by stress.

S

- [Mindfulness Intervention & Obesity Rates](#)
- [Mindful Eating](#)
- [Mindful Schools Programming](#)

8 Decreasing Consumption of Sugar-Sweetened Beverages

Sweetened sodas and other sweetened beverages like coffee or tea, energy or sports drinks, juices, and alcoholic beverages are a main source of added sugar in the American diet. According to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, these beverages account for almost half of all added sugars consumed. Sugar-sweetened beverages have been directly linked to obesity, a leading cause of heart disease, type-2 diabetes, and some cancers. A typical 10 oz grape juice drink contains 8 teaspoons of sugar – twice the recommended amount for preschoolers!

Statewide Indicator: Percentage of high school youth who **did not** drink sugar-sweetened beverages, energy drinks, lemonade, sweetened tea or coffee drinks, flavored milk, Snapple, or Sunny Delight, not counting soda or 100% fruit juice, one or more times per day during the past 7 days.

2019: 83.4% of high school youth

Possible Strategies and Activities

Y Street is VFHY's volunteer initiative for high school students who develop skills to engage their communities and drive positive change.

Work with local [Y Street](#) members to implement [Rev Your Bev's](#) comprehensive water policy in local school districts, prioritizing:

- Recognition that water is an essential nutrient
- Staff modeling healthy beverage consumption in front of students
- Providing students and staff easy access to clean, safe, and good tasting water free of charge
- Making free water available throughout and after the school day
- Regular maintenance of water sources and containers
- Allowing students to bring water bottles to use
- Promoting water consumption through communications, and/or printed materials
- More Resources: [Rev Your Bev Policy Toolkit](#) for K-12 Settings

Increase the number of child-serving institutions for children 5 and younger that implement one or more of the following practices:

- Create a written policy about water promotion practices
- Offer children water at least twice a day and ensure that water is visible and available to children indoors and outdoors
- Only serve healthy beverages, such as water or unflavored milk, and never serve sugar-sweetened drinks to children
- Encourage children who are developmentally ready to serve themselves water
- Teachers role model and encourage water drinking
- More Resources: [Early Care Education Rev Your Bev Policy Guide](#)

Host a water promotion event, such as a Rev Your Bev campaign event in a school, childcare, or community-serving setting to increase awareness, and improve knowledge among children and parents about the benefits of drinking water and avoiding sugar-sweetened beverages.

- [Rev Your Bev](#)