

WEATHER OR NOT!



A Texas Department of Health Guide for Delivering Physical Activity Information to Texans Every Day

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Introduction

Cardiovascular diseases, including heart disease and stroke, are the most common causes of death in Texas, accounting for almost 40% of all deaths in 1995. In the same year, cancer accounted for 25% of all deaths. Diabetes is one of the leading causes of disability in Texas, and our state has one of the highest rates of diabetes in the nation. It has been proven that physical activity reduces the risk of early death in general and of heart disease, high blood pressure, some cancers, and diabetes, as well as reducing the severity of debilitating conditions such as arthritis. In addition to these benefits, regular physical activity improves strength and endurance, builds bone mass, and controls weight.

However, in the late 1990's 28% of Texans surveyed reported no exercise, recreation, or physical activity during the previous month, and 56% of those surveyed reported leading a sedentary lifestyle. This number is higher in certain subsets of the Texas population such as women, African-Americans, and Hispanics. More than one-half of Texas adults are classified as overweight, with nearly one-fifth classified as obese.

Thus the need for Texans to incorporate regular physical activity into their lives is great. Unfortunately, many people believe that physical activity must be strenuous, costly, and time-consuming to be effective. On the contrary, physical activity is doing anything rather than just sitting. The health benefits can come from accumulating just 20 to 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week. Even moderate amounts of exercise such as brisk walking, bicycling, pushing a baby in a stroller, playing a game of volleyball, vacuuming the house, or digging in the garden will reduce the risks of developing many chronic diseases. And it does not have to occur all at once - people can spread physical activity throughout the day.

Research shows that people need ongoing encouragement to both begin and maintain a physically active lifestyle. "Weather Or Not" is a concept that links health departments or organizations committed to promoting physical activity with local media - television, newspapers, or radio - to incorporate a weather-appropriate physical activity suggestion into each daily forecast. For example, if the forecast predicted 80 degrees and sunny, a twenty-minute walk around the neighborhood or a half hour in the garden might be suggested. However, if it were 40 degrees and raining, thirty minutes vacuuming the carpets or climbing several flights of stairs might be called for.

Organizers would be responsible for providing participating media with tips, hints, and suggested activities appropriate for all seasons and weather, as well as some sample scripts to help the forecasters get started. At the end of each day's suggestion, Texans should be reminded to accumulate at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week - "Weather or Not."

Chapter 1

Approaching Local Media

News media are time-sensitive communication tools with time-driven production schedules. Be respectful of that fact. When making plans to approach newspapers and TV or radio stations, do your homework. Know how often the newspaper comes out or the news broadcast airs, what area they cover, what their emphasis is (for example, is the newspaper a metropolitan daily full of local, state, national, and world news or is it a community paper which focuses more on the local football team, who's marrying who, and what the school board did last week), and who the decision-makers are.

This information can be found by simply picking up a copy of the paper or tuning into the news broadcast. Read the articles and watch the news segments, noting especially where the news comes from. If you are interested in newspapers, check the mast box (found in the first four pages of all legal newspapers) for the names of editors and managing editors. Contact TV and radio stations to determine the name of the station manager or producer who might best help you.

Whether you initially send an introductory letter or place a phone call, always try to arrange to meet face-to-face with station managers, reporters, editors, and producers. Because most media work under production deadlines, remember to make sure to schedule a meeting for the most convenient time for them, not you. For example, morning daily newspapers have afternoon or evening deadlines, so the best time to schedule a meeting with an editor would be before noon.

When you meet, be prepared - have all the materials you might need ready for use. Emphasize the importance of promoting physical activity throughout the community. If you or another group that you know of has successfully implemented "Weather Or Not," share the results, especially the benefits that it brought to the station or newspaper. Be sure to take some sample scripts with you so they can fully understand what you are intending, however, be receptive to any ideas or suggestions they might have.

Even if the editor, station manager, or producer does not or cannot participate in

“Weather or Not,” if you have made a good impression you must maintain the relationship. You are now a “source” that he or she can contact when there is a question about nutrition and physical activity or any issues affecting your community’s health. In addition, you have a media contact who you can approach whenever you need publicity.

Finally, make sure that you offer “Weather or Not” to only one media outlet at a time. TV stations, newspapers, and radio stations compete with each other and would not appreciate learning that this “unique opportunity” you have offered them is already going on at their rival station or newspaper.

Chapter 2

Sample Letter to Media

Please Note: this sample is to a television station. It will need to be modified if sent to a newspaper or radio Station.

Dear Station Manager (put in name),

I am writing you on behalf of (your organization's name). We believe in partnering with our community to educate, develop networks, and build skills in order to initiate environmental and policy change strategies that reduce chronic disease. One of our goals is to promote the inclusion of daily physical activity as part of a healthy lifestyle. Please refer to the attached fact sheet about chronic disease and physical activity in Texas.

Texans should be encouraged to view physical activity as something that can be easily incorporated into their everyday lives. To do this, we would like your help. We believe that because (their news program) is viewed by so many Texans each day, you are in a unique position to affect and reinforce knowledge and attitudes about physical activity.

We would like to propose an innovative collaboration between (local station), your weather forecaster, and (your organization). "Weather Or Not," a concept developed by the Texas Department of Health, would consist of your forecaster delivering weather-appropriate physical activity tips at the end of the forecast each day. For example, if it were sunny and 80 degrees, your forecaster may suggest to viewers that they take a walk around their neighborhood, wash their car, or work in the garden. If it

were 40 degrees and there was a chance of rain, the forecaster might suggest going to the mall for a walk or climbing several flights of stairs at the office. The forecaster could then end each tip with the reminder to make sure to accumulate 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week, “Weather Or Not.”

We will provide you with weather and season appropriate physical activity tips, hints, and suggestions, as well as some sample scripts (it might be a good idea to include some samples with this letter). We can work together to determine the most convenient method for information exchange.

We believe that “Weather Or Not” will benefit both (television station name) and your viewing public. You will be providing a public service free of charge that could potentially affect the quality of life for thousands of Texans. To ensure the program’s effectiveness and long-term feasibility, we can also work together to measure and evaluate viewer response.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (xxx) xxx-xxxx. I will follow up this letter with a call to arrange a meeting.

Thank you for your consideration!

Chapter 3

Physical Activity Fact Sheet

Texas Department of Health Data

Cardiovascular diseases, including heart disease and stroke, are the most common causes of death in Texas, accounting for almost 40% of all deaths in 1995. In the same year, cancer accounted for 25% of all deaths. Diabetes is one of the leading causes of disability in Texas, and our state has one of the highest rates of diabetes in the nation.

African-American Texans have a higher rate of both heart disease and stroke than whites or Hispanics. Hispanic Texans have a higher rate of diabetes than whites or African-Americans.

Almost one-half of the Texas adult population is classified as overweight (Body Mass Index greater than or equal to 25), while nearly one-fifth are considered obese (Body Mass Index greater than or equal to 30).

It has been proven that physical activity reduces the risk of early death in general and of heart disease, high blood pressure, some cancers, and diabetes, as well as reducing the severity of debilitating conditions such as arthritis. In addition to these benefits, regular physical activity improves strength and endurance, builds bone mass, and controls weight.

In the late 1990's 28% of Texans surveyed reported having had no exercise, recreation, or physical activity during the previous month, and 56% of those surveyed reported leading a sedentary lifestyle. This number is higher in certain subsets of the Texas population such as women, African-Americans, and Hispanics.

Health benefits can come from accumulating just 20 to 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week. Even moderate amounts of exercise such as brisk walking, bicycling, pushing a baby in a stroller, playing a game of volleyball, vacuuming the house, or digging in the garden will reduce the risks of developing many chronic diseases. And it does not have to occur all at once - people can spread physical activity throughout the day.

For more information about chronic disease or physical activity, please contact the Texas Department of Health at 512-458-7670, or visit their website at www.tdh.state.tx.us/wellness

Chapter 4

Sample Scripts

Television or Radio

- “. . . and the skies should be clear through the evening, with a high today of seventy-two degrees. Looks like a perfect day for a brisk walk around your neighborhood, but don’t forget to stretch before and after! Channel X and the X Health Department want you to remember that accumulating just 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week can boost your energy, reduce stress, and lower your risk of chronic disease. So get active - Weather or Not!”
- “. . . looks like the rain and cold temperatures are going to continue through Thursday. Your best physical activity bet for today would be to take the stairs instead of the elevator, and tack on a few extra flights for good measure. Channel X and the X Health Department want East Texans to remember that just 30 minutes of physical activity spread over most days of the week can boost your energy, reduce stress, and lower your risk of chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers. So get active - Weather or Not!”

Newspaper

- “. . . High 72. Partly Cloudy Skies. Winds 5 - 10 MPH. The X Times and the X Health Department want you to remember that “Weather or Not,” accumulating just 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week can boost your energy, reduce stress, and lower your risk of chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers. Today’s physical activity tip: Spend at least 20 minutes working in your garden.”
- “. . . High 44. Sunny skies. Winds 5 MPH. “Weather or Not:” The X Times and the X Health Department want to encourage Central Texans to spread at least 30 minutes of physical activity over most days of the week to boost energy, reduce stress, and lower the risk of chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers. Today’s physical activity tip: Take a few laps around the mall before doing your shopping.”

- “. . . High 95. Cloudy Skies. Winds 0 - 5 MPH. The X Times and the X Health Department want you to remember that “Weather or Not,” getting at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week can boost your energy, reduce stress, and lower your risk of chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers. Today’s physical activity tip: Drink plenty of fluids before, during, and after physical activity, especially during hot weather.”

Chapter 5

Weather and Season

Appropriate Physical Activity Suggestions

	INDOOR	OUTDOOR	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL	WINTER
WALKING OR JOGGING	X	X	X	X	X	X
STAIR-CLIMBING	X		X	X	X	X
GARDENING		X	X	X	X	
BICYCLING		X	X	X	X	
VACUUMING	X		X	X	X	X
RAKING LEAVES		X			X	X
SWIMMING	X	X	X	X	X	X
MALL-WALKING	X		X	X	X	X
TOUCH FOOTBALL		X			X	X
WASHING THE CAR		X	X	X	X	

	INDOOR	OUTDOOR	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL	WINTER
MOWING THE LAWN		X	X	X	X	
DANCING	X		X	X	X	X
VOLLEYBALL		X	X	X	X	
TENNIS		X	X	X	X	
IN-LINE OR ROLLER SKATING	X	X	X	X	X	X
MUSEUM-WALKING	X		X	X	X	X
MOPPING	X		X	X	X	X
WASHING WINDOWS	X		X	X	X	X
BASKETBALL	X	X	X	X	X	X
PUSHING A STROLLER	X	X	X	X	X	X
RACQUETBALL	X		X	X	X	X
HIKING A STATE PARK		X	X	X	X	

Holiday-Appropriate Activities

New Year's Eve - Dancing
New Year's Day - Touch Football
Valentine's Day - Dancing
Texas Independence Day - Two-Stepping
Easter - Outdoor Easter Egg Hunt
Cinco de Mayo - Dancing
Memorial Day, Veterans' Day - Walking a Local War
Memorial or Veterans' Cemetery
Independence Day - Baseball or Softball
Labor Day, Thanksgiving - Touch Football
Halloween - Trick-or-Treating
Day after Thanksgiving - Mall-Walking
Christmas Eve, Christmas - Caroling in the Neighborhood

Remember That Some Activities Are More Appropriate for Certain Days of the Week. For Example, Dancing Is a Great Suggestion for the Weekend, While Walking Can Be Done Any Day.

Chapter 6

Other Physical Activity

Tips and Hints

- Set realistic goals for yourself. If you are a beginner, start with short physical activity sessions and gradually increase.
- Consult with your physician before significantly increasing your level of physical activity.
- Begin and end brisk activity with a few minutes of stretching to prevent injury. Stretch your muscles slowly, holding each stretch for 10 - 15 seconds. Don't bounce!
- Drink plenty of fluids before, during, and after physical activity, especially during hot weather.
- Wear sturdy comfortable shoes and socks to prevent blisters during physical activity.
- Wear sturdy comfortable shoes and socks to prevent blisters during physical activity.
- Wear a minimum of light-colored, loose-fitting clothes for activity in hot weather.
- In cooler weather, layer your clothing to trap heat between layers and remove layers as you feel warm.
- For nighttime physical activity, have a buddy and wear reflective clothing or strips. Always remain in well-lit, open places where other people are around. Walk or jog on soft, even surfaces such as a level grass field, dirt path, sidewalk, or running track.

- If you feel any unusual discomfort during physical activity, slow down or stop. Call your doctor if you feel any of the following symptoms: pressure or pain in the chest, arms, or neck; dizziness; nausea.
- Always wear a properly-fitted helmet while bicycling.
- Ask a friend or loved one to join you in physical activity. Set a schedule for regular activity and reward yourselves when you stick with it.
- Use your breaks or lunch hour at work to climb stairs or take a walk around the grounds.

Chapter 7

Suggestions for Evaluation

Evaluation is necessary to measure the effectiveness of a program. One method for evaluating “Weather or Not” is surveying media viewers and/or readers. The survey would query them on their awareness of the “Weather or Not” messages and whether they had learned anything from the messages, had changed their behavior because of the messages, believed that the station or newspaper and the health department were providing a relevant and timely service, or wanted to see the program continue. The following example is intended for newspaper subscribers. The survey could be conducted over the phone or by mail (perhaps attached to a bill or subscription notice to be returned with a payment) to a representative sample of subscribers.

- 1) Have you noticed the “Weather or Not” physical activity messages in The X Times that began appearing on April 2nd?
 - 1 - yes
 - 2 - no

- 2) How often do you read the weather forecast in The X Times?
 - 1 - 6-7 days a week
 - 2 - 3-5 days a week
 - 3 - 1-2 days a week
 - 4 - I never read the weather forecast in The X Times

- 3) How often do you read the “Weather or Not” physical activity messages?
 - 1 - 6-7 days a week

- 2 - 3-5 days a week
3 - 1-2 days a week
4 - I never read the “Weather or Not” physical activity messages (skip to question 7)

- 4) How much have you learned about physical activity and/or its benefits by reading the “Weather or Not” physical activity messages?
1 - a lot
2 - some
3 - a little
4 - I’ve learned nothing
- 5) How much have the “Weather or Not” physical activity messages motivated you to increase your level of physical activity or maintain an active lifestyle?
1 - a lot
2 - some
3 - a little
4 - Not at all
- 6) How often do you incorporate a specific “Weather or Not” suggestion or tip into your week?
1 - a lot
2 - sometimes
3 - rarely
4 - never
- 7) Do you believe that by publishing “Weather or Not,” The X Times and the X Health Department are providing a valuable service to East Texas?
1 - yes
2 - no
- 8) Would you like to see the “Weather or Not” physical activity messages continue in The X Times?
1 - yes
2 - no
- 9) What is your age? ____ What is your gender? M F

What is your race/ethnicity? ____

- 10) What is your current level of physical activity?
- 1 - Less than 30 minutes of moderate physical activity fewer than three days a week
 - 2 - At least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity at least three days a week

Surveying television viewers and radio listeners can be more difficult because you will not have a defined list of subscribers. Work with your participating stations to determine how they survey viewers and listeners. Perhaps you could work with the stations to include a survey in the Nielsen rating packets that go to local viewers or listeners. The following questions can be substituted for the first four questions in the previous survey for newspaper subscribers. With some slight modifications, questions 5-11 would be the same.

- 1) Do you ever watch Channel X's Eyewitness News at 5 or 6pm?
- 1 - yes
 - 2 - no (skip to question . . .)
- 2) Have you noticed the "Weather or Not" physical activity messages during Channel X's 5 or 6pm news?
- 1 - yes
 - 2 - no
- 3) How often do you pay attention to Channel X's 5 or 6pm weather forecasts?
- 1 - 6-7 days a week
 - 2 - 3-5 days a week
 - 3 - 1-2 days a week
 - 4 - I never pay attention to Channel X's 5 or 6pm weather forecast
- 4) How often do you pay attention to the "Weather or Not" physical activity messages?
- 1 - 6-7 days a week
 - 2 - 3-5 days a week
 - 3 - 1-2 days a week
 - 4 - I never pay attention to the "Weather or Not" physical activity messages (skip to question . . .)

