



Rochester's Steps Program

Increasing family fitness opportunities

What is the public health problem?

The increasing rate of overweight and risk for overweight among toddlers and young children is a major concern in this southern Minnesota community.

- In Minnesota, among children aged 2–5 years who participate in the state's Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) supplemental nutrition program, the prevalence of those who are considered overweight or at risk of becoming overweight is close to 30%, according to the 2006* Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance System (PedNSS).
- In addition, the 2006 PedNSS data for Minnesota's WIC program showed that nearly 25% of children aged 2–5 in Olmsted County, which is part of Rochester's Steps community, are considered overweight or at risk of becoming overweight.

How Steps is responding

In August 2005, Rochester's Steps Program implemented the Fit WIC program to help parents and their children aged 3–4 become more physically active.

- Fit WIC kits offer tools and resources for play, recreation, physical activity, and structured skill-building activities. A picture activity book for non-English-speaking clients further expands the program's reach.
- Steps and the Rochester YMCA launched a related program called Fit WIC the Y's Way to give WIC parents free access to the YMCA's programs. Free child care is offered for infants and toddlers, and

older children can participate in YMCA children's programs, which include homework help. Teens have access to their own Y Space recreation area.

- Incentives are offered to encourage families to join Fit WIC the Y's Way, and the Rochester YMCA offers financial aid to families who want to continue using the facility after the 4-week program ends.

What is the impact?

To date, more than 700 Fit WIC kits have been distributed to families in Rochester.

- Participants' activity levels were examined over a 1-year period (via pre/post surveys), showing an almost 50-minute increase in the average minutes of physical activity per day per preschool child.
- Parents have also reported a 10% increase in moderate activity levels, in addition to an increase in the time spent playing with their children. Eighty-eight percent of participants report using the kit more than 2–3 days per week, on average.

Why this program is working

According to *The Guide to Community Preventive Services*,[†] people will become more physically active if they are given health information along with access to new or improved places where they can be active. By establishing healthy eating and physical activity habits early in life, children are more likely to carry these habits into adulthood.

* Most recent data available

[†] <http://www.thecommunityguide.org>