



Best Practices Guidelines

Incorporating healthy food and physical activity into afterschool and out-of-school time (OST) programs is an integral component of a comprehensive strategy to prevent childhood obesity. This factsheet profiles afterschool and OST guidelines that have been developed by national and regional experts to advance best practices for healthy eating and physical activity as part of a comprehensive strategy. To learn more, please visit the Center's [*Minnesota Afterschool and Out-of-School Time Toolkit for Healthy Eating and Physical Activity*](#).

Why are nutrition and physical activity guidelines important in OST settings?

Over the past five years, several national and state agencies and non-profits have developed or adopted guidelines to advance best practices for healthy eating and physical activity in afterschool and other OST programs.^{1,2,3,4} These guidelines are part of a national movement to transform schools, neighborhoods, and communities into environments where children and youth are active and nutritious foods are the norm, not the exception.

Promoting healthy nutrition and physical activity in OST settings is part of a comprehensive effort to support healthy weight in children and youth. In the past thirty years, the number of obese children has almost tripled,⁵ and 12.5 million children between the ages of two and 19 are now obese.⁶ While weight gain is a healthy part of a child's growth and development, excess weight in children can cause serious short- and long-term health problems. One

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study found that 70% of obese children have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or other risk factors for heart disease.⁷ Children with unhealthy weight are more likely to become overweight or obese adults, putting them at risk for type 2 diabetes, heart disease, sleep apnea, stroke, and some types of cancer — health conditions that may affect their ability to engage with their families and communities and be successful adults.⁸ There is a dizzying array of health information available today. Nutrition and physical activity standards help communicate best practices and policy recommendations that will make a real difference in the lives of children and youth, and create OST programming that fosters lifelong health and wellness.

Why focus on OST programs?

Afterschool and other OST programs have been gaining attention as important, yet often overlooked, venues for promoting nutritious food and physical activity among children and youth. Children and youth in Minnesota spend an average of six hours a week in afterschool settings during the school year,⁹ and many spend the

whole day, five days per week, at summer programs that operate during the standard work week. About a third of Minnesota's children, or 255,000 children, attend summer programs.¹⁰ To the extent possible, afterschool and other OST programs, whether based at school sites or elsewhere, should be fully integrated into a school district's wellness policies and related programs, such as Coordinated School Health. OST programs can provide dynamic opportunities to reinforce healthy messages and model and practice skills and behaviors introduced during the regular school day.

Minnesota children who participate in afterschool programs are more likely to be from low-income families or communities that face substantial barriers to healthy food and safe spaces to play. Four in five children in afterschool programming in Minnesota are eligible for free and reduced lunch, and about a quarter of them speak English as a second language.¹¹ Recent immigrants and children from low-income families stand to benefit the most from increased opportunities to access nutritious food and active play in OST settings.

TABLE 1: Harvard's Food & Fun Afterschool Nutrition and Physical Activity Environmental Standards in Out-of-School Time Programs*†

1. Do not serve sugar-sweetened beverages.
2. Serve water every day.
3. Serve a fruit and/or vegetable at every meal and snack.
4. Do not serve foods with trans fat.
5. When serving grains (like bread, crackers and cereals), serve whole grains.
6. Eliminate broadcast and cable TV, and movies. Limit computer time to less than one hour each day.
7. Provide all children with at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity every day. Offer 20 minutes of vigorous physical activity at least 3 days per week.

* The standards are available in a poster format: http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/prc/files/2012/11/healthy_places_healthy_kids_poster.pdf. For more information on the rationale behind the standards, please visit: <http://www.foodandfun.org/resources/pdf/environmentalStandards.pdf>.

† A brief description of the rationale for each standard and suggestions for implementation strategies can be accessed at: http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/prc/files/2012/11/ymca_nutritionandpaenvironmentalstandardsforost110209.pdf.

What are some examples of guidelines?

Recent guidelines developed or adopted by national and state agencies and non-profit organizations^{12,13,14,15} are designed to advance evidence-based, practical, quality nutrition and physical activity standards that will achieve the best possible outcomes for participating children and youth.¹⁶ The guidelines provide practical standards to help afterschool/OST programs: 1) improve the nutrition of snacks and meals; and 2) select activities and play spaces that will increase physical fitness.

In 2007, the IOM issued nutrition guidelines for competitive foods — snack foods and beverages that are sold in schools outside of the federal school meal programs. The IOM guidelines were based on the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and limited fat, saturated fat, sugar and sodium content in snacks, and portion sizes, calories, and caffeine in beverages. The IOM organized the *competitive* foods standards into two tiers. Tier 1 included foods and beverages that were “encouraged.” Tier 2 included snacks and beverages that were allowed only for high

school students, and only after school. Beverages with sweeteners, carbonation, or flavoring were allowed in Tier 2, but not in Tier 1.¹⁷ In 2010, the IOM issued new recommendations to improve U.S. Department of Agriculture guidelines for school meals, as well as meals and snacks offered through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).¹⁸ In 2008, more than 300,000 children nationwide received subsidized snacks and meals through CACFP.¹⁹

In 2006, the Harvard School of Public Health Prevention Research Center on Nutrition and Physical Activity began piloting comprehensive nutrition, physical activity, and screen-time guidelines in YMCAs and YMCA-affiliated sites across the country using a newly created curriculum, *Food & Fun After School*.²⁰ Over 500 YMCA sites have since implemented the program, and the YMCA recently announced that it intends to adopt similar guidelines in 85% of its centers by 2015.²¹

Harvard's Food & Fun After School guidelines were formalized into standards by the National Institute of Out-of-School Time (NIOST) in 2011, and have

**TABLE 2: Healthy Kids, Healthy New York After-School Initiative Toolkit:
Guidelines for nutrition, physical activity, and screen time**

Nutrition

1. Serve nutritious snacks that include only:
 - Low-fat or fat-free milk.
 - Vegetables and fruits (fresh, frozen or canned) with no added sugar, salt, or fat.
 - 100% vegetable or fruit juice (limited to 6 ounce portions and served a maximum of two times per week).
 - Vegetable protein items (nuts, beans, seeds) or low-fat animal protein items (meat, poultry, fish, cheese, and plain/flavored yogurt).
 - Whole grain crackers, breads, or cereals (first ingredient must be a whole grain such as whole wheat).
 - Single servings of prepackaged food items that meet the above standards.
2. Any food items served contain zero grams of trans fat.
3. Any foods and beverages sold, served or offered in addition to, or instead of, the reimbursable meal or snack (vending machines, party food, fundraising, etc.) also meet the standards listed.
4. Water is available at all times and easily accessible to children.
5. If the provider requires or allows parents to send in snacks, the snacks should meet the nutrition guidelines above.

Physical Activity

1. Engage children in physical activities that are designed to recognize differences in age, physical and mental development, and skill level.
2. Schedule at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity for all participants during each 3-hour block. (At least half of that activity time should be scheduled outdoors.)
[Note: Additional time, e.g., 15 minutes, should be scheduled for set-up, clean-up, or other transitions before and after activity.]
3. Provide an activity break after no more than 60 continuous minutes of sedentary activity.

Screen Time

1. Limit television or recreational screen time (e.g., videos, DVDs, computers, portable electronic devices) to no more than 2.5 hours (30 minutes per day) per 5-day week. Computer use for homework is exempted.
2. Ensure that television programming, videos, DVDs, or computer programs are age-appropriate, non-violent, and educational.
3. Use programs that actively engage child movement most frequently.
4. Avoid commercial advertising.

since been adopted by the National Afterschool Association (NAA). The NAA [Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Standards](#) can be accessed through [NIOST](#) and the [NAA](#).

Harvard's Food & Fun After School guidelines contain seven standards (see Table 1). The curriculum provides suggestions for parents and recommends environmental actions such as removing posters and advertisements that promote unhealthy foods and restricting students' access to vending machines in OST settings. Harvard's Food & Fun After School materials are user-friendly and, for that reason, these guidelines may be easier for program staff and management to implement than similar materials developed by other programs.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently updated CACFP's guidance document, [At-Risk Afterschool Meals: A Child and Adult Care Food Program Handbook](#) to be consistent with the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#). The prior handbook lacked guidance for serving a variety of fruits and vegetables and reducing saturated fat and sodium levels in meals and snacks.²²

State and local governments have partnered with non-profits and others to develop guidelines for OST programs, with apparent success. New York State, for example, has developed a set of nutrition, physical activity and screen time guidelines in partnership with the Boys & Girls Club, YMCAs, the PTA, the New York School Board Association, and the state's CACFP program. The [Healthy Kids, Healthy New York After-School Initiative Toolkit](#) is straightforward and easy to understand, and includes a self-assessment tool, sample menus, a sample program schedule, and a list of suggested vending machine items (see Table 2). The toolkit is designed to be consistent with CACFP and National School Lunch Program standards.²³

In North Carolina, the [Move More After-School Collaborative](#) has developed afterschool standards

specifically for physical activity through a partnership with North Carolina's Boys & Girls Club, the YMCA, PTA, and 4-H Club, the Recreation and Park Association, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the School of Medicine at Brody University. These partners used a survey, a focus group, and a consensus panel to develop a best practices guidance. The [Move More After School Collaborative Recommended Standards for After-School Physical Activity](#) describes the benefits of physical activity on academic outcomes, health and development, and includes examples of age-appropriate active games, as well as tips for adapting activities for children with special needs.

The Alliance for a Healthier Generation — a partnership between the American Heart Association and the William J. Clinton Foundation — has also developed standards and guidelines for OST programs, the [Healthy Out-of-School Time Framework: Standards and Best Practices for Developing Healthy Out-of-School Time Environments \(Framework\)](#).²⁴ The *Framework* organizes recommended nutrition and physical environmental standards by the persons responsible for implementing them (e.g., program staff, program directors, parents). The Alliance offers free technical assistance to programs that are interested in adopting best practices for healthy eating and physical activity. A number of OST programs in multiple states and regions have adopted the *Framework*.

Afterschool settings provide promising venues for nurturing obesity prevention practices. Now that a number of states and national organizations have developed model guidelines specifically for OST settings, future work in this area will benefit from ensuring that the most up-to-date standards are included in guidelines. In addition, best practices need to be communicated to OST providers in user-friendly materials and through training and technical assistance opportunities.

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Endnotes

- ¹ INST. OF MED., NAT'L ACADS., CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM: ALIGNING DIETARY GUIDANCE FOR ALL (2010), *available at* <http://www.iom.edu/~media/Files/Report%20Files/2010/Child-and-Adult-Care-Food-Program-Aligning-Dietary-Guidance-for-All/CACFP%202010%20Report%20Brief.pdf>.
- ² PREVENTION RESEARCH CTR., HARVARD UNIV., CHANGES IN YMCA AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS INCREASE CHILDREN'S PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTH FOOD OPTIONS (2012), *available at* <http://www.cdc.gov/prc/prevention-strategies/YMCA-Harvard-Afterschool-Food-and-Fitness-Project.htm>.
- ³ MOVE MORE N.C., RECOMMENDED STANDARDS FOR AFTER-SCHOOL PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (2009), *available at* <http://www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/AfterSchoolStandards/Texts/NCAfterSchoolStandardsFINAL.pdf>.
- ⁴ N.Y. STATE HEALTHY EATING & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ALLIANCE ET AL., HEALTHY KIDS HEALTHY NEW YORK: AFTER-SCHOOL INITIATIVE TOOLKIT, *available at* http://www.health.ny.gov/prevention/obesity/healthy_kids_healthy_ny/healthy_kids_healthy_ny_afterschool_toolkit.pdf.
- ⁵ CTR. FOR DISEASE CONTROL & PREVENTION, CHILDHOOD OBESITY FACTS, *available at* <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/obesity/facts.htm>.
- ⁶ CTR. FOR DISEASE CONTROL & PREVENTION, DATA AND STATISTICS, *available at* <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/childhood.html>.
- ⁷ Ctr. for Disease Control & Prevention, *supra* note 5.
- ⁸ *Id.*
- ⁹ AFTERSCHOOL ALLIANCE, MINNESOTA AFTER 3PM (2009), *available at* http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM_2009/AA3_Factsheet_MN_2009.pdf.
- ¹⁰ AFTERSCHOOL ALLIANCE, AMERICA AFTER 3PM, SPECIAL REPORT ON SUMMER: MISSED OPPORTUNITIES, UNMET DEMAND (2010), *available at* http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/documents/Special_Report_on_Summer_052510.pdf.
- ¹¹ AFTERSCHOOL ALLIANCE, *supra* note 10.
- ¹² INST. OF MED., NAT'L ACADS., NUTRITION STANDARDS FOR FOODS IN SCHOOL: LEADING THE WAY TOWARD HEALTHIER YOUTH (2007), *available at* <http://www.iom.edu/~media/Files/Report%20Files/2007/Nutrition-Standards-for-Foods-in-Schools-Leading-the-Way-toward-Healthier-Youth/FoodinSchools.pdf>.
- ¹³ INST. OF MED., *supra* note 1.

- ¹⁴ JEAN L. WIECHA ET AL., NAT'L AFTERSCHOOL ASS'N STANDARDS FOR HEALTHY EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (2011), *available at* http://www.niost.org/pdf/host/Healthy_Eating_and_Physical_Activity_Standards.pdf. Adopted by the National AfterSchool Association in April 2011, these standards were developed by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time at the Wellesley Centers for Women (NIOS), in collaboration with the College of Nursing and Health Sciences at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, and the YMCA, with funds from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. For more information about the development of these standards, see <http://www.niost.org/Standards-and-Guidelines/national-afterschool-association-standards-for-healthy-eating-and-physical-activity-in-out-of-school-time-programs>.
- ¹⁵ HARVARD SCH. OF PUB. HEALTH PREVENTION RESEARCH CTR., FOOD AND FUN AFTER SCHOOL, 2nd ed., (date unknown), *available at* <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/research/prc/projects/food-fun>.
- ¹⁶ NAT'L INST. ON OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME, NATIONAL AFTERSCHOOL ASSOCIATION STANDARDS FOR HEALTH EATING AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMS, (date unknown), *available at* <http://www.niost.org/Standards-and-Guidelines/national-afterschool-association-standards-for-healthy-eating-and-physical-activity-in-out-of-school-time-programs>.
- ¹⁷ INST. OF MED., *supra* note 12.
- ¹⁸ INST. OF MED., *supra* note 1. For more about the CACFP program and its relationship to afterschool programming, please see Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) in Afterschool and Out-of-School Time Settings.
- ¹⁹ INST. OF MED., *supra* note 1.
- ²⁰ HARVARD SCH. OF PUB. HEALTH PREVENTION RESEARCH CTR., *supra* note 15.
- ²¹ PREVENTION RESEARCH CTR., HARVARD UNIV., *supra* note 2.
- ²² INST. OF MED., *supra* note 1.
- ²³ N.Y. STATE HEALTHY EATING & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY ALLIANCE ET AL., *supra* note 4.
- ²⁴ ALLIANCE FOR A HEALTHIER GENERATION, HEALTHY OUT-OF-SCHOOL-TIME FRAMEWORK: STANDARDS AND BEST PRACTICES FOR HEALTHY OUT-OF-SCHOOL-TIME ENVIRONMENTS (2012), *available at* https://alliance.amm.clockwork.net/_asset/pqkqhk/HOSTFramework.pdf.