

## Summary of Minnesota Child Care Regulations on Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Screen Time: Obesity Prevention Considerations

Early childhood is an important period for developing dietary and physical activity behaviors. Nearly three-quarters of US preschool-aged children spend time in nonparental care arrangements each week. The majority of this care takes place in child care centers, licensed family child care homes and/or Family, Friend and Neighbor (informal) care. The practices of these programs can be an important factor in children's dietary intake and physical activity levels; thus, child care program policies can have an impact on childhood obesity. Two recent studies examined state-level child care licensing regulations governing nutrition, physical activity and screen time that may contribute to childhood obesity.<sup>1,2</sup> Although each study chose somewhat different key items on which to compare state regulations, both found that regulations for child care facilities vary considerably by state and by type of child care program and that many states have few or "weak" regulations governing these items. Both studies also noted that child care centers are more regulated than family child care homes.

### Nutrition

Minnesota requires that meals and snacks follow federal Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) requirements in all types of licensed child care programs. Less common among states is Minnesota's requirement that specifies the proportion of children's daily nutrition needs that must be offered per meal or by length of time in care. Minnesota also regulates the number of meals and snacks that must be served, depending on the amount of time a child is in care. Like the vast majority of states, Minnesota has no policy requiring food served to be consistent with *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and has no policies addressing foods of low nutritional value or foods available in vending machines.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, as is common in most states, Minnesota licensing regulations require that water is freely available during care.<sup>2</sup>

### Physical Activity

Minnesota's regulations concerning physical activity are typical of those in the majority of states, and again are much stronger for child care centers than for family child care homes of any size. All licensed child care programs in Minnesota are required to provide large muscle or gross motor activity, development, and/or equipment. Only centers are required to provide daily outdoor activity time (weather and health permitting). Minnesota does not specify the amount of time that children play outside daily. The state also does not require that children be engaged in vigorous or moderate physical activity or specify the minimum amount of time that children are to be involved in physical activity. This is typical of the vast majority of states.

### Screen Time

Screen time includes TV viewing and other forms of electronic media use (such as computers, cell phones, video games and hand-held devices). Minnesota has no licensing regulations concerning screen time in child care programs. The most common way that other states regulate media use is by defining, in a non-quantified manner, its appropriate inclusion in child care program activities. A smaller number of states are leading the way by setting a maximum number of hours of screen time per day or per week or a minimum age for screen time. Many of

these states require child care programs to provide alternatives to TV viewing, and several require parental permission for their child to watch television during child care hours.

Both of these studies concluded that providing consistent regulations for both centers and family child care homes is desirable. They also concluded that strengthening state regulations and standards governing nutrition, physical activity and screen time has the potential to influence the prevalence of childhood obesity by fostering healthful eating habits, participation in physical activity and decreased screen time.

**References:**

<sup>1</sup>Child Care as an Untapped Setting for Obesity Prevention: State Child Care Licensing Regulations Related to Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Media Use for Preschool-Aged Children in the United States, by Karen M. Kaphingst, MPH, and Mary Story, PhD, RD

<sup>2</sup>Obesity prevention in child care: A review of U.S. state regulations, by Sara E Benjamin, Angie Cradock, Elizabeth M Walker, Meghan M Slining and Matthew W Gillman