Tulane University
Prevention Research in a Rebuilding Community

Addressing the physical and social environmental factors underlying the obesity epidemic

Rebuilding Healthy Neighborhoods for Children and Families in New Orleans

Investigators: Thomas Farley, MD, MPH
Traci Hong, PhD

Funding Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (Award #053855)

This survey and advocacy project seeks to incorporate health promotion into the rebuilding of New Orleans. The project surveyed resident priorities for rebuilding neighborhoods. Results cited these top priorities in neighborhood rebuilding:

- Low crime
- Good street lighting
- Sidewalks and crosswalks
- Trees and greenery
- Parks and playgrounds
- Little car traffic
- Absence of litter
- Bus or street car lines
- Neighborhood grocery stores

A companion brochure demonstrated “What Makes a Neighborhood Healthy” with a visual diagram of what that neighborhood could look like in New Orleans.

Head-off Environmental Asthma in Louisiana

Principal Investigators: Maureen Lichtveld, MD, MPH
LuAnn White, PhD, DABT

Funding Source: National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences/National Institutes of Health

Conducted in conjunction with the New Orleans Department of Health, the purpose of the HEAL project is to learn about the effects of mold and other indoor allergens on children with asthma in post-Katrina New Orleans.

The study will:

- evaluate the effectiveness of a novel asthma care management intervention on children ages 4 - 12;
- emphasize environmental risk control;
- test the hypothesis that morbidity can be reduced among children with moderate to severe asthma;
- and will use an enhanced Asthma Counselor program that provides both asthma care management and guidance for addressing environmental exposures.

ACTION!

Core Research Project
Partnership for an Active Community Environment

Principal Investigator: Jeannette Gustat, PhD., MPH
Program Manager: Kathryn M. Parker, MPH

Goals include:

- Identify and address barriers to physical activity in a defined, low-income New Orleans neighborhood.
- Train a team of lay health advisors to develop appropriate local projects to improve health.
- Implement at least one neighborhood-wide physical environmental change.
- Assess the impact of the changes on the physical activity of community members.

Status of the project:

- Delayed one year, due to the affects of Hurricane Katrina.
- Baseline survey and physical activity observations have been completed.
- Intervention will be designated soon.

The Impact of Food Availability on Diet

Principal Investigator: Diego Rose, PhD, MPH, RD

Funding Source: National Institutes of Health/National Cancer Institute

Baseline survey and physical activity observations have been completed. Intervention will be designated soon.

Status of the project:

- 66% of the children observed in the schoolyard were "walking" or "very active."

New Orleans Food Access and Consumption Study

Funding Source: USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service/National Research Initiative

In a separate effort, the PRC is also working to develop a Food Policy Advisory Committee, authorized by the New Orleans City Council, that would study the issues of food access and make concrete recommendations to address it.

The Schoolyard Project

Principal Investigator: Tom Farley, MD, MPH

Funding Source: USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service/National Research Initiative

Through the efforts of this project, a schoolyard remained open on weekday afternoons and Saturdays. Before the project began, the schoolyard was locked when school was not in session. Results of the intervention were compared to a control schoolyard, that remained fenced and locked outside of class time.

Results of the 3-year pilot project found:

- 66% of the children observed in the schoolyard were "walking" or "very active."
- Over the entire follow-up period, there were 84% more children observed outdoors and physically active in the intervention neighborhood (including the schoolyard) than in the control neighborhood.

Surveys suggest that children in the intervention neighborhood reduced their level of watching television and doing other sedentary activities.

These results suggest that rather than displacing activity that would have taken place elsewhere, availability of a safe play space may actually have increased play in the surrounding neighborhood.

The Prevention Research Center has just begun a new study to compare activity levels on schoolyards where the non-profit group KaBoom is installing brand new play structures.