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PRESS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Small changes can make a big difference in Riverside County's obesity epidemic

With a new study highlighting the local economic costs of obesity, county health officials are reminding residents that small lifestyle changes can have a significant positive impact to their health.

The California Center for Public Health Advocacy released a study on July 9 that looks at the increased costs of adult obesity and physical inactivity. Riverside County is estimated to have a \$1.6 billion annual impact in obesity-related health care costs, lost productivity and decreased quality of life.

The study demonstrates that obesity not only has detrimental health impacts, but can also have considerable economic consequences, said County Health Officer Eric Frykman. Even during difficult financial times, residents can take several steps to limit their risk for obesity.

"Families can take a daily 30-minute walk together and increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables," Frykman said. "These small changes can make a significant difference to their health."

The county Department of Public Health has spearheaded several efforts to target obesity's health impacts and shape policy that encourages healthy behavior. The Riverside Fit Families program is a family-based effort to encourage parents and children to set and reach health goals. About 75 percent of participants report that the program has helped them make healthier food and lifestyle choices.

Health officials are also working with county planning staff to incorporate a health element to the scheduled general plan update in 2010. A health element will ensure that new developments include parks, bicycle paths and mixed-use neighborhoods. These changes will encourage walking and other physical activity.

For more information about the county Department of Public Health's programs, visit www.rivcoph.org. For questions about the study, visit the California Center for Public Health Advocacy's site at www.PublicHealthAdvocacy.org.

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