



NEWS RELEASE

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Move for Health on World Health Day

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health joins the World Health Organization in observing World Health Day 2002, April 7. This year's theme, Move for Health, highlights the need for physical activity and the importance of fitness and a healthy lifestyle.

A major cause of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and obesity, is lack of physical activity. The World Health Organization estimates that lack of activity leads to more than 2 million deaths per year. It is likely that one-third of cancers can be prevented by maintaining a healthy diet, normal weight and physical activity throughout one's life.

A combination of improper diet, lack of physical activity and tobacco use are estimated to be the cause of up to 80 percent of premature coronary heart disease. In countries as diverse as China, Finland and the U.S., studies have shown that even relatively modest lifestyle changes are sufficient to prevent the development of almost 60 percent of type 2 diabetes cases.

The World Health Organization reports that in most parts of the world, non-communicable diseases have become a major epidemic. This is due, in part, to a rapid transition in lifestyles leading to reduced physical activity, changing diets and increased tobacco use. This trend is present in all societies, rich and poor, developed and developing.

Poverty, violence, rapid social and economic changes, lack of education, inadequate or total absence of health services, and a lack of clear policy direction, contribute as much to the increase in cases of cancer, diabetes, or cardiovascular diseases, as they do to AIDS and malaria. The World Health Organization believes that this is the time for the global debate to be directed as much towards prevention as to cure.

Physical activity can be a practical means to achieve numerous health gains, both directly or indirectly. It can bring down rates of violence among young people, promote tobacco-free lifestyles, and decrease other risky behaviors, such as unsafe sex or illicit drug use. It can also reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness among the elderly and improve their physical and mental agility.

For more information about the importance of physical activity, contact the Nutrition and Physical Activity Unit, Alabama Department of Public Health, (334) 206-5226. The Alabama Department of Public Health website at <http://www.adph.org> has information on physical activity, or check the World Health Organization website at <http://www.who.int/world-health-day/eng.shtml>.

