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# Deschutes County targets obesity

By Kayley Mendenhall  
The Bulletin

Obesity is an epidemic nationwide and Central Oregon is not immune to the problem, said Sherri Tobin, a dietitian with the Deschutes County Health Department,

"Since 1980, in the United States ... obesity has tripled among teens," Tobin said Tuesday. "Twenty-three percent of eighth graders in Deschutes County are overweight. ... Twenty-two percent of 11th graders are overweight."

Those numbers are according to the Deschutes County Health Report 2004, Tobin said, and the classification "overweight" is determined based on a body-

mass index calculation.

She and Brenda Johnson of St. Charles Medical Center-Bend spoke at the Deschutes County Public Health Advisory Board meeting Tuesday afternoon to give an update on a county-wide initiative to target obesity.

Tobin and Johnson are part of Healthy Active Central Oregon, a group that formed about a year ago as a spinoff of the Central Oregon Health Council. The group has spent the past year looking at the causes of obesity, identifying strengths and weaknesses in Central Oregon and looking for gaps in services to fight obesity here.

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## Obesity Group is also encouraging women to breast-feed babies

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"This is an epidemic in our country. We see great numbers of people getting larger," Tobin said. "It's not just because we're lazy. Our environment has changed and a lot of things make it difficult for us to make healthy choices."

A lack of sidewalks and concerns about safety often keep children from walking or riding their bikes to school, Johnson said. Families eat more meals out at restaurants, kids can buy soda and candy from vending

machines at schools and time spent in physical education is decreasing.

"We live in a natural playground," Tobin said. "We want to encourage people to move more. Take the stairs at work. Reduce television-viewing time, computer time and video games."

Healthy Active Central Oregon is also encouraging women to breast feed because of the health benefits to the mom and baby.

And, the group plans to continue working on nutrition education in the schools, along with establishing public policy to support healthy choices.

The World Health Organization slogan, "Make the healthy choice the easy choice," Johnson said, has become the mantra of Healthy Active Central Oregon.

The group meets the third Monday of every month in the health and learning center at St. Charles.

"Keep it in mind," she said. "There really is power in each of our voices."

The Deschutes County Public Health Advisory Board also received updates on the following topics at its Tuesday meeting:

- Dan Peddycord, Deschutes County health services administrator, said state legislation that would recommend cities fluoridate their water is making its way through the Legislature and may become law.

The bill does not require cities to fluoridate the water, he said. Representatives of the health department have met with both the city of Bend and the city of Redmond to discuss fluoridation and to show support for fluoridating

the water in Central Oregon.

- The county's school-based health-center program received certification on April 18 and is poised to receive about \$50,000 from the state if money for school-based health centers stays in the final state budget, said Elaine Severson of the Deschutes County Health Department.

- Bruce Abernethy of the Meth Action Coalition gave a presentation on meth use in Central Oregon and work being done to fight the problem. His group has plans to work with local businesses to start a Meth Watch campaign here that would flag items at grocery stores often used to make meth.

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