



Routine "recess" a hit at White House obesity summit

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By JoAnne Allen

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - A doctor's endorsement of frequent recess breaks -- and not just for kids -- drew an appreciative response from experts meeting at a White House summit on childhood obesity on Friday.

Dozens of child advocates, public policy experts and doctors gathered to brainstorm ideas for first lady Michelle Obama's campaign to wipe out childhood obesity in a generation.

An interagency task force reviewing U.S. programs and policies on child nutrition and physical activity is due to report to President Barack Obama within the next month.

The summit participants were asked to come up with three to five recommendations for the task force to consider taking to the president.

Healthier foods in corporate cafeterias and linking public transportation to grocery store access were among the early suggestions.

But the audience especially appeared to appreciate a California doctor's call for a drive to integrate short bursts of physical activity into the regular workplace and school routine.

"We have great meetings with lots of healthy refreshments now, compared to 20 years ago when we would only have unhealthy refreshments, or 30 years ago when people would have been smoking in this room," said Dr. Toni Yancey of University of California Los Angeles.

"Now we need to not coop people up for hours on end without physical activity," Yancey continued as laughter erupted from colleagues in the windowless auditorium.

The experts' advice and guidance would help the task force develop measurable benchmarks for fighting childhood obesity, Michelle Obama said at the start of the session.

The United States spends \$150 billion a year to treat obesity-related conditions. The costs are projected to almost double over the next decade and will account for a fifth of overall healthcare spending, White House budget director Peter Orszag said.

Besides direct healthcare costs and lost productivity, Orszag said the magnitude of obesity-associated health risk may not be fully appreciated.

"Having a body mass index in the obesity range is equivalent to aging 20 years in terms of the chronic conditions that you face," Orszag said. "So, 40 may be the new 30, but if you're obese, unfortunately, 40's the new 60."

(Editing by Eric Walsh)

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