

Preventing Obesity Through Reduced Screen Time Interventions

Based on strong evidence of effectiveness for reducing screen time and improving weight-related outcomes, the Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) recommends behavioral interventions aimed at decreasing screen time (e.g., watching TV, playing computer or video games, or surfing the internet). The recommended interventions include a range of activities, including skill building, goal-setting, and reinforcement techniques; parent or family support through information and environmental strategies; and TV challenges that encourage participants to give up watching TV for a specified amount of time. The majority of recommended interventions are geared toward children and adolescents in schools, preschools and daycare centers, WIC centers, and research clinics.

Task Force Recommendation: [Obesity Prevention and Control: Behavioral Interventions to Reduce Screen Time](#)

Translating Recommendations into Public Health Practice and Policy. The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide) can help guide a state’s approach for reducing screen time among children and adolescents.

Partnerships. Behavioral approaches for reducing screen time can involve a wide range of partners, including public health professionals and officials, early childhood organizations, child-care providers and resource centers, schools, employers, and community organizations.

Issues and Considerations. State experiences provide useful strategies for addressing common challenges related to implementing evidence-based screen-time strategies.

- **Tap into Existing Initiatives and Partnerships.** Existing partnerships between state health and education agencies and child-care entities can be used to integrate new content and training related to screen-time policies. For example, the Michigan Department of Community Health and the Early Childhood Investment Corporation’s existing “Obesity Prevention in Early Care & Education” initiative provided a platform for incorporating evidence-based screen time reduction strategies.
- **Take Advantage of Evidence-Based Materials and Resources.** States do not have to start at square one; national model standards and Task Force recommended interventions provide useful tools and resources that can be implemented among early childcare and education providers.

Action Steps. The action steps that follow in Table 1 provide a continuum of options for state agencies and other stakeholders that want to implement evidence-based screen-time strategies.

Table 1. Action Steps and Options

Phase	Action Steps and Options
Pre-implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Inform and educate</u> internal and external partners about the Task Force’s screen time reduction recommendations and resources. • <u>Engage key partners</u> in childcare, schools, community organizations, and state health and education agencies. • <u>Gather baseline data about current screen-time policies and practices and provider knowledge about obesity prevention and screen-time strategies.</u> A pre-intervention survey to assess childcare professionals’ knowledge can identify knowledge gaps and technical assistance needs. • <u>Analyze data to identify unmet needs and wellness opportunities.</u> States may opt to appoint a working group to analyze data, develop strategies, and monitor outcomes.

Implementation

- **Adopt model child-care licensing standards for obesity prevention.** The National Policy & Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity (NPLAN) provides model screen-time standards that states can adapt for child-care providers and schools. CDC’s “[Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity](#)” recommends that licensed child-care facilities limit screen time to no more than two hours per day for children less than two years of age.
- **Develop informational resources to educate, disseminate resources, and connect stakeholders.** A website clearinghouse (such as [Michigan’s Healthy Childcare website](#)) provides a repository of tools, fact sheets, and success stories. Print materials—brochures, posters, fact sheets—and social media campaigns can educate parents and providers about childhood obesity.
- **Provide technical assistance, training and informational outreach** to help child-care providers, schools, community and parent organizations, and other stakeholders adopt healthy screen-time practices. The Community Guide, NPLAN, CDC, and other resources and tools can be used to inform stakeholders and implement evidence-based policies and practices.

Evaluation/ Improvement

- **Evaluate outcomes and improve programs.** Evaluations of child-care centers by parents or licensing entities can identify technical assistance needs and inform program development and improvement. The Michigan State Team (see “State Experiences”) partnered with the evaluation team from the Michigan Public Health Institute.
- **Identify opportunities to incorporate related recommendations.** Partners involved in screen-time reduction strategies can also consider related interventions, including nutrition and physical activity standards and practices for daycares, schools, WIC centers, and other settings.

State Experiences. In 2008, 17 states regulated screen time in child-care centers and 15 states regulated screen time in family child care homes.¹ State health agencies also have adopted strategies to educate parents and teachers and provided technical assistance to help them implement screen time best practices. The following examples illustrate state actions in two states.

In 2012, a state team representing the **Michigan** Department of Community Health, Michigan Public Health Institute, Early Childhood Investment Corporation, and Great Start to Quality Resource Centers adopted a coordinated strategy for reducing screen time. The plan involved training child-care providers, providing information to families and providing fact sheets to healthcare providers to help them engage and educate families. The team trained staff from the Child Care Resource and Referral System on specific behavioral interventions and established monthly conference calls to provide technical assistance and promote information sharing among childcare professionals.

The **Minnesota** Department of Health and national partners sponsored a statewide videoconference on TV viewing and childhood obesity in 2009, which informed the “[Fast Forward to Better Health: TV/Screen Time Obesity Report](#).” The report summarizes state screen-related policies and recommends limited screen time in child-care programs, as well as social marketing to promote awareness of the connection between screen time and childhood obesity.

Additional Resources and Links

An electronic version of this and other action sheets, with links to the resources listed in this document, is available at <http://www.astho.org/Programs/Evidence-Based-Public-Health/>.

- ASTHO and National Network of Public Health Institute [Michigan State Team Overview](#)
- CDC, [Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States: Implementation and Measurement Guide](#), 2009
- National Academies Press, “[Early Childhood Obesity Prevention Policies](#),” 2011

¹ Benjamin, S., A. Craddock, E. Walker, M. Slining and M. Gillman. “Obesity prevention in child care: A review of U.S. state regulations.” *BMC Public Health*. 2008. 8:188.