

NEWS RELEASE

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DROP JUICE FROM WIC-ELIGIBLE FOODS, DOCTORS URGE

MINNEAPOLIS - The Minnesota Medical Association (MMA), a professional organization representing about 10,000 physicians, is urging the U.S. Department of Agriculture to eliminate fruit juice from the list of eligible foods in the WIC supplemental nutrition program for women, infants and children and to add fruit and vegetables instead.

“It’s important for federal programs to help reduce obesity especially in children,” said David Luehr, M.D., president of the MMA. “Obesity puts children at risk for developing high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and type 2 diabetes as well as bone and joint problems, and depression.”

The percentage of overweight children has more than doubled in the past 20 years, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

MMA physicians believe that the WIC program should encourage families to eat fruits and vegetables every day and to limit their consumption of fruit juice in order to prevent

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obesity. Almost 80 percent of young people do not eat the recommended number of servings of fruits and vegetables, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

Currently, any adult or infant fruit and/or vegetable juice or juice blends (e.g., orange, grapefruit, apple, grape, pineapple, tomato, cran-apple) are WIC-eligible. Fruits are not WIC-eligible.

The only vegetables that are WIC-eligible are “mature dry beans or peas (e.g., lentils, black, navy, kidney, garbanzo, soy, pinto, and mung beans; Crowder, cow, split and black-eyed peas)” and fresh, raw or frozen carrots.

The proposed rule based on the Institute of Medicine’s final report on WIC food packages “Time for a Change,” calls for a significant improvement, according to the MMA. The revised food package for young children would match current recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics. Juice would be limited to about 4 oz. a day and a cash value voucher would allow the purchase of fruits and vegetables.

The MMA strongly supports this change but urges the Dept. of Agriculture to go even further and entirely eliminate juice from the list of WIC-eligible foods.

MMA physicians believe that the consumption of fruit juice contributes to obesity in children. Fruit juice tastes good and can easily be sipped throughout the day, adding to calorie consumption. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, fruit juice

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offers no nutritional advantage over whole fruit and lacks the fiber of whole fruit.

Kilocalorie for kilocalorie, fruit juice can be consumed more quickly than whole fruit.

The MMA urges the Dept. of Agriculture to take this important step to reduce obesity in children.