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PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Lead the Way to Better Health With 5 A Day

With the school year now underway, the Pinellas County Health Department urges parents to “Lead the Way by Choosing Fruits, Vegetables and Physical Activity” during National 5 A Day Month in September. Parents can help reverse the trends in childhood obesity, high blood pressure and Type II diabetes by “leading the way” at home, at their children’s schools and when eating out.

“It is vital for parents, as the most influential role model in children’s lives, to lead by example,” said John P. Heilman, M.D., M.P.H, Director of the Pinellas County Health Department. “Too many of our children are fighting diet-related illnesses. Parents need to lead the way to helping children develop healthy eating and physical activity habits that will stick with them throughout life.”

Obesity rates have doubled in children and tripled in adolescents over the last two decades, with one in seven young people now obese, and one in three overweight.

“Lifestyle habits begin at home at a very early age,” said Marla Short, a nutritionist with STEPS to a HealthierPinellas. “Our children and teens are beginning to suffer from health problems due to illnesses that normally happen later in life, like obesity, Type II diabetes and pre-hypertension. As role models, it’s our duty to make sure our children don’t continue down this path.”

Everyone should eat five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables a day for better health and get at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity most days of the week. It’s important for parents to lead the way to a healthy future by eating healthfully themselves. Studies show that parents who encourage their children to eat fruits and vegetables are actually those who eat more fruits and vegetables themselves. At home, parents can

- Engage kids in the grocery shopping process, from putting their fruit and vegetable favorites on the list to bagging their choices in the grocery store’s produce section.
- Keep a fresh fruit bowl on the table or counter, and keep easy-to-grab-and-eat vegetables in the refrigerator.
- Serve two vegetables with dinner.

National 5 A Day Month in September is the perfect time of year for the whole family to learn more about the importance of eating fruits and vegetables, and work together to meet the five to nine a day recommendations. For more information, visit www.pinellaswellness.com or www.5aday.gov.

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The mission of the Pinellas County Health Department is to promote, protect and improve the health and safety of residents and visitors through public and private community efforts.