

## **UIC Receives \$16M to Study Impact of Environment on Kids' Health**

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The University of Illinois at Chicago's ImpacTeen project has been awarded a four-year, \$16 million grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to study policy and environmental factors that influence youth behaviors related to nutrition, physical activity, obesity and tobacco use.

ImpacTeen has received \$22.5 million from the foundation over the past 11 years and is one component of Bridging the Gap, a partnership between UIC and the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. ImpacTeen has primarily focused on adolescent tobacco, alcohol and illicit drug use.

"In recent years we've started to pay more attention to diet, physical activity and obesity," said Frank Chaloupka, distinguished professor of economics and director of the Health Policy Center at UIC's Institute for Health Research and Policy and principal investigator of the study. "There are numerous long-term health consequences associated with the rise in obesity in kids and significant health care costs associated with that."

ImpacTeen researchers will look at national food marketing on television and legislation that impacts local environments. They will focus on state policies that potentially impact diet, activity and weight in kids. At the community level, school district wellness policies that aim to promote more physical activity and create healthier food environments will be assessed.

Schools will be surveyed to obtain information on the availability of various foods and beverages a la carte, through vending machines or school stores, and as part of the school meal; availability of fast foods at school; participation in school meal programs; classroom snack policies; student physical education and other physical activity; and other factors.

In some communities, researchers will look at what opportunities are available to kids for physical activity -- such as walking/biking paths, bike racks, parks, sidewalks, recreation facilities and dance studios -- and what characteristics of the built environment may promote or serve as barriers to activity among kids. The availability -- or lack of availability -- of healthy food options in communities will also be identified.

"Policy makers at all levels -- at the federal level, state level, local level, in schools and other organizations -- are really trying to do different things, taking different approaches to try to address these issues," Chaloupka said. "With this project we can add to the evidence about what works to impact kids' diets, activity levels and ultimately their weight outcomes."

The goal of ImpacTeen is to provide comprehensive and definitive research that will enable legislators and policymakers to develop effective policy and make informed decisions about appropriating dollars earmarked for changing youth health behaviors.

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This news release was written by Sherri McGinnis González of the UIC News Bureau.

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