

Nearly 20 percent of Americans between ages 6 and 19 are considered obese. “Health Jam” is an effort to promote a healthy, active lifestyle to children at risk for obesity.

Health Jam is coordinated by the University of Illinois Extension office in partnership with Pana Community Hospital and Pana Unit #8 Schools, where 65 percent of students come from low-income families. Obesity disproportionately affects low-income families: Nearly half of Illinois children in low-income families are overweight compared to one-fourth of children in families with higher incomes.

The first Health Jam in Pana was held in April-May 2017. Extension and hospital staff met with 5th grade students during physical education class for six weeks. The hospital’s wellness manager led students in group exercise and students received a pedometer to track their steps.

Students also learned about the health risks associated with soft drinks, how to make healthy food choices, alternatives to sedentary activities and more. The program ended with a health career day showcasing presentations from various hospital staff, including a nurse practitioner and wellness manager.

Health Jam, which will continue in 2018, is funded through a grant from Wal-Mart. Extension and hospital staff donated staff work time to run the program.

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