



PUBLIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ADVISORY BOARD

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Menu Labeling Advocated by Health Advisory Group

An influential health advisory group is urging the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors to support menu labeling in restaurants as a way to stem the childhood obesity epidemic. The percentage of seriously overweight children has tripled in the past two decades and in California, more than half of all adults are overweight.

The Contra Costa Public and Environmental Health Advisory Board (PEHAB) wants members of the Board of Supervisors to support SB 120, a bill in the California legislature that would require chain restaurants with 10 or more outlets in California to provide nutritional information on printed menus and menu boards. Americans consume about a third of their calories at fast food restaurants.

PEHAB, a 19-member group of Contra Costa residents, recently asked each member of the Board of Supervisors to take a quiz to pick the healthiest items from a short list of common fast foods. Supervisors did better than the general public. In a similar Field Research Corporation poll released last week, two-thirds of the Californians surveyed failed all four questions. (Take the quiz PEHAB used online at cchealth.org)

"It's no surprise that people don't know which fast food items have the fewest calories, lowest fat and least salt. Most people want to make healthy choices but they need information and what looks like the healthiest food usually isn't," said Marjorie Leeds, Chair of PEHAB.

Six months ago, the Board of Supervisors directed Contra Costa Health Services to work with schools, physicians and child care providers to prevent the escalating epidemic of childhood obesity. The Board will hear a report from Health Services and discuss support for SB 120 at its meeting on Tuesday, April 24.

Jeffrey Ritterman, MD, a PEHAB member, says advisory group members support a number of strategies for addressing obesity, including campaigns that would counteract the marketing of non-nutritious foods and encouraging local groups to work together to develop policies. He says starting with menu labeling in fast food restaurants is a logical place to start.

"Americans spend almost 50% of their food dollars away from home and that figure will keep going up," Ritterman said. "Since food eaten away from home has more calories and less nutritional value than food prepared at home, people who eat out need to be given accurate information so they can make healthy choices."

The Field Research poll showed that 84% of those surveyed support menu labeling requirements. Leeds says PEHAB hopes even restaurants that aren't covered by SB 120 will voluntarily begin menu labeling to help their customers. # # #

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