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## CDC urges Miss. schools to stay healthy

*The Associated Press*

A U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention official on Monday urged Mississippi education leaders to continue fighting obesity and tobacco use in the state's schools.

The CDC recently released a report showing the state has made significant progress in reducing student access to tobacco and unhealthy snacks on school grounds, as well as educating youth about good nutrition.

Dr. Howell Weschler, director of the CDC's division of adolescent and school health, said Mississippi had become a model for the nation, but warned against complacency.

"This obesity epidemic that we face is the No. 1 public health challenge of our time. It will lead to an inordinate amount of suffering of our young people as they grow up unless we get a handle on it," Weschler said during a news conference at the Mississippi Department of Education in Jackson.

He said a CDC study found that 1 out of 3 children born in 2000 will be diabetic in their lifetime unless Americans adopt healthier lifestyles.

Mississippi has had the nation's highest obesity rates since 2004, but officials are encouraged by what's happening in the public schools.

A CDC report released last week said fewer secondary schools in the U.S. were selling candy and salty treats on campus.

In Mississippi, the share of schools banning unhealthy snacks went from 28 percent in 2006 to 77 percent in 2008, Weschler said.

He said the schools went from "junk food heaven" to the "healthiest school nutrition environments in the nation."

Weschler said Mississippi ranked among the top five in the nation for implementing strong tobacco-free policies, and he said three out of four schools in the state are teaching all eight of the national health education standards.

The CDC has been conducting the surveys since 1996, but Weschler said this was the first time any state had made such dramatic improvements.

Interim State Superintendent of Education John Jordan said his agency's Office of Healthy Schools started many of the programs after receiving \$15 million in grants from the Bower Foundation since 2003.