



**Partnering The University of Arizona Cancer Center, Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health, Canyon Ranch Center for Prevention and Health Promotion and the UA Extension Service to promote a healthier community of Arizona children.**

Healthy Children Arizona (HCA) is a standardized health education program provided to the children of Tucson, Phoenix and surrounding communities in Arizona offered since 2005. The program was created for early primary grades, kindergarten through third, to engage and empower children to develop healthy habits in nutrition, physical activity and sun safety. The HCA program is comprised of five 35 minute classroom lessons provided on a weekly basis over a five-week period. These lessons aligned with the Arizona state standards for education. The lessons are designed to actively engage students in interactive and experiential learning. Classroom learning may be complimented with a family fun nutrition and physical activity afternoon or evening wherein the students and their parents/guardians are invited to participate. This event offers hands-on learning and information for the parents and guardians to support healthy habits for the entire family.

The HCA program was developed by Sabrina Plattner, M.Ed., Senior Health Educator for both the Mel & Enid College of Public Health (MEZCOPH) and The University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Service with support from Cynthia Thomson, PhD, RD, Professor, MEZCOPH and Director of MEZCOPH Canyon Ranch Center for Prevention and Health Promotion, as well as several faculty, staff and local teachers who provided valuable review of materials and educational approaches.

The program has evolved to become a cross-campus effort to reach the children of Arizona with a message of early healthy lifestyle habits with the intent to have a lasting impact on individual and family health. As we encourage our children to become physically active it is expected they will spend more time outdoors. Outdoor activity in Arizona means sun exposure, thus an important aspect of the HCA curriculum is sun safety. The target behaviors of diet, activity and sun safety is consistent with the cancer prevention message of The University of Arizona Cancer Center, the only National Cancer Institute-designated comprehensive cancer center headquartered in Arizona. The Cancer Center serves as a vital partner in this effort.

**“This whole program was excellent! The kids remember every lesson.”**

*- Participating teacher, as stated on 2010-2011 evaluation of HCA*

Experts estimate that up to 60 percent of all cancers are preventable through healthy lifestyle choices such as avoidance of tobacco, weight control, healthy food selection and being physically active. As we gain in our understanding of chronic diseases that affect our nation it is increasing evident that lifestyle choices and behaviors adopted in childhood can have a lasting



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impact on one's health in a lifetime against diseases such as cancer.

With the reduction in health education and physical activity programs in the schools and the decline in shared family meals, it is important to identify other approaches to educate and encourage our children in the area of healthy lifestyle choices. HCA provides one alternative approach.

**"I liked the way you used a variety of multiple intelligences to reach all learning styles. My students were very involved in the lessons."**

**- Participating teacher, as stated on 2010-2011 evaluation of HCA**

According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Trust for America's Health, Arizona ranks 15th in the nation, having one of the higher rates of childhood obesity. Poor nutrition is compounded by lack of physical activity. In Arizona it is estimated that less than one-third of our children and adolescents participate in vigorous physical activity every day. The HCA offers a working partnership with schools to promote healthy lifestyle behaviors at the primary grade level providing Arizona's children with the tools they need to reduce lifetime risk of cancer and other chronic disease. The Healthy Children Arizona Program offers an excellent additional resource to the students, teachers and the school systems in Arizona in the area of health education.

More than 20,000 elementary students have received the Healthy Children Arizona program in the Southern Arizona and Phoenix. The program has received excellent ratings among principals, teachers and parents.



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