

# Parent Communications— Stay Cool

Newsletter article: Use this article in your organization's publications. Be sure to include the credit "Provided by Harvard Prevention Research Center on Nutrition and Physical Activity."

## Cool Kids Are Healthy Kids

Summer has arrived! As the kids explode out of doors to play, may sure they *drink water*. While kids are busy playing, the last thing they're thinking about is taking a water break! This is where you come in—offering cold water and a healthy snack during your children's play is the best way to help them stay hydrated and energized. Here are some tips to keep your kids happy, healthy, and hydrated:

- ▶ **Drink often.** Children need to drink water every 20 minutes when physically active in hot weather. Bring a pitcher of water (or water bottles) out to the yard to make it easy for kids to stop for water breaks.
- ▶ **Drink enough.** During longer periods of activity, 1 gulp from a drinking fountain isn't enough to keep your kids hydrated. Encourage them to take at least 10 gulps of water—the more hydrated they are, the longer they will be able to play!
- ▶ **Ditch the sugar.** Try not to serve your kids specialized sports drinks. Most of these are designed for endurance athletes who compete at high intensity for longer than an hour. Chances are that your kids are not endurance athletes (yet!)—they are running, skipping, jumping, hiding, or waiting in line for a turn. Save the sports drinks for all-day sports camps in which kids are truly active for a long time or for when the kids are playing outdoors in high temperatures.
- ▶ **Ask questions.** When you can't monitor your children's play, make sure that day camps or school programs allow for water breaks at least once for every half hour of activity or up to three times during a whole hour of activity. If your kids come home gulping water, chances are they are already dehydrated from not drinking enough during activity times. While you're at it, ask program leaders what the schedule is for snacks and meals. Programs should provide time for snacks in between meals or at least every 2 to 3 hours. This is especially important in the morning, as many children eat breakfast well before camp starts, if at all!

Staying hydrated is essential not only during the hot summer but also during the rest of the year—especially if children are playing in a gymnasium or indoor area where it gets hot. Setting an example now can help your kids learn how to stay healthy and hydrated as they get older, whether they're playing four square or playing on a high school soccer team!

From L.W.Y. Cheung, H. Dart, S. Kalin, and S.L. Gortmaker, 2007, *Eat Well & Keep Moving*, 2nd ed. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics). Adapted, by permission, from *Food & Fun After School Parent Communications*. ©2006 President and Fellows of Harvard College.