

City's Summer Fun program urges keiki to forgo soda pop

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jun 13, 2012 LAST UPDATED: 01:49 a.m. HST, Jun 13, 2012

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By 'Alohi Bikle / abikle@staradvertiser.com



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More than 9,000 youngsters enrolled in the city Summer Fun program will get some help living up to a pledge to go soda-free.

Sugar-sweetened beverages in vending machines at 60 district park locations with Summer Fun programs have already been replaced with water and 100 percent fruit juice. The changes will remain permanent.

The Department of Parks and Recreation worked with the Department of Enterprise Services and machine vendors when planning the removal of selected drinks from machines, said Deputy Parks Director Al Tufono.

To help tackle the high obesity rates among Hawaii's youth, the city in partnership with the state Department of Health, launched "Get Active, Get Fit ... E Oni Kakou" campaign Tuesday to the students and staff at Manoa District Park's Summer Fun. The presentation will be made at the other Summer Fun sites this week.

The campaign was in the planning stages for more than 18 months and part of a bigger initiative to create a more healthy environment for kids and adults who participate in activities at parks and recreation facilities, Tufono said.

As part of the campaign, he said, for the first time the city is asking students to make a "soda-free summer pledge."

Students will take the pledge to be soda-free while attending designated Summer Fun, which started Tuesday and runs through the last week in July.

Eleven-year-old Lauren Dela-Cal-zada, who has attended Summer Fun at Manoa District Park for the past five years, said she "knows for a fact" that she will be able to live by the pledge and have a soda-free summer.

"My parents make sure that I eat and drink healthy foods," she said.

"I can count on one hand the number of times I have soda every month."

In addition to changing the drinks in vending machines at the parks, the state Department of Health

donated more than 8,000 water bottles for the students to encourage them to bring their own water instead of purchasing drinks from vending machines.

State Health Director Loretta Fuddy said 1 in 3 students in preschool and kindergarten are already overweight or obese and that over the past 10 years there has been a 26 percent increase in obesity among Hawaii's high-schoolers.

She said that the decision to start with a soda ban versus other snacks came about after looking at the calories in soda.

She added that efforts are being made around Hawaii to ban soda not only in student-populated areas, but also in the workplace, where a state Workplace Wellness program promotes healthy activity.

Corey Watanabe, 17, a junior leader for Manoa Summer Fun, said the soda-free summer pledge is a good way to get students thinking more healthy thoughts, which will lead them to be more active.

"Having them be active is the most important thing," he said, "Healthy and active is even better."

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