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HIALEAH

American Heart Association, hospital sponsor youth fitness event

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Palmetto General Hospital nurse, Yvette Soto, uses a teddy bear to teach Miami Lakes residents, Brooke Ingersoll, 6, and her brother Alec Ingersoll, 3, what happens at the doctor's office, during the American Heart Association and Palmetto General Hospital's Hopeful Futures Back to School Blast, Saturday, Aug. 23. Palmetto General Hospital is located at 2001 W. 68 St., Hialeah.

HEALTH TIPS

Doris Aguilar, a pediatrician at [Palmetto General Hospital](#), provided tips on how children can stay healthy during the school year.

- Children should keep their hands clean with soap and water or hand sanitizer.
- Children should not touch their face and mouth with dirty hands, a main way to spread germs.

- Parents should purchase school bags with two straps to even out the weight of the books and minimize back aches.

Laura and Brian Parada, siblings from Hialeah, went from table to table to hear about nutrition, do some exercises and have fun. In the end, they got a shiny medal, and lessons about how to be fit.

"The medal is so that I can be healthy. It is important so you can have energy," said Laura, age 6.

Laura and 3-year-old Brian were among hundreds of children and parents from Hialeah, Miami Lakes and Doral who attended the Hopeful Futures Back-to-School Festival. The event designed for families and aimed at ensuring parents and children are ready to head back to school, was recently held at Palmetto General Hospital.

Over 300 children, attending the fair, received free health services including blood pressure checks, immunizations and eye and ear screenings. Some got to play "doctor" with teddy bears they brought along, or were supplied by the hospital.

The festival is part of a larger mission by the American Heart Association -- curbing childhood obesity and promoting physical activity for more Americans.

Elissa Merida, a representative with the heart association, said she hoped to educate both children and parents about living healthy. "We are here to spread awareness about heart disease and epidemic obesity among children," Merida said.

Palmetto General and Tenet Foundation and the heart association to sponsor the Go Healthy Challenge, a national initiative promoting fitness and nutrition.

Heart association officials say childhood obesity is a leading health threat in the United States. Association statistics show that nearly 12 million children ages 2 to 19 are overweight, and another 12 million are at risk of becoming overweight.

Obesity comes at a cost as more children develop conditions and diseases typically associated with adults.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, a third of individuals born in 2000 will develop Type 2 diabetes. Health officials fear children will have shorter life spans than their parents if the obesity trend continues.

Doris Aguilar, a pediatrician at Palmetto General Hospital, spoke with parents and children about the importance of keeping a healthy lifestyle and staying safe during the school year.

Aguilar also spoke about the importance of vaccinating children and keeping up with vaccinations as children grow into adolescents.

Children visited six stations to learn how to be healthy and happy. The stations teach children that their heart needs to be working to be healthy, explained Merida.

At the Happy Heart station, kids learned how to take their pulse. American Heart Association volunteers explained to children that the pulse for a healthy heart should be between 60 to 140 for young people and 60 to 100 pulses for adults.

At Station 2, Everyday Fitness, volunteers engaged the children in various exercises like jumping jacks and push ups. After exercising volunteers took the children's pulse again so they could notice the difference exercise makes on the heart.

At other stations they learned about proper hydration, getting energy through healthy food choices, as well as winding down and resting after exercise. After that, children took a pledge for healthy living and received a medal and a lunchbox for school. Their parents got a recipe book of healthy meals.

When they finished, Laura and Brian showed off their medals. Laura also discussed some of what she learned. Her pledge was to be healthy all year and to help her little brother be healthy.

"I learned to stay healthy and eat a lot of fruits, juice and vegetables," she said. "It is also important to stay healthy so we can be strong."