

## First 5 Health Van Brings Important Message to Inyo



**By Jody Veenker**

Families of children from birth through age 5 are invited to come cook up some fun with the First 5 California Hands on Mobile Health Van in the Bishop Park on Labor Day!

This traveling exhibit boasts healthy games, prizes, and information for children and parents. Inyo First 5 will join the traveling Edu-tainers to promote local health resources and give out free books and childhood nutrition and fitness DVDs featuring Elmo.

“This is a great place to access free resources and information,” says First 5 Commissioner Linda Benson. “Whether you are looking for fun, active games to play with your child, a cookbook with healthy snack ideas, or even just a list of all the free book depots throughout the county – you’ve got to come out on Monday and have some fun with the giant fruit toss.”

The Health Van couldn’t be visiting Inyo County at a more apropos time. Recently First 5 and the Public Health divisions of HHS released joint findings of separate needs assessments they conducted earlier this year to the County Board of Supervisors. The numbers were grim, spelling out that more Inyo county children are overweight, or at risk of being overweight, every year. The average percentage of overweight children under 5 has grown from just below 13% in the 1990s to almost 20% now.

Concerns over rising childhood obesity rates topped both the Maternal Child and Adolescent Health (MCAH) Assessment by the Health Department and the First 5 2009 Countywide Needs Assessment. Across the board in every community in Inyo, parents and medical and educational service providers indicated childhood obesity was a top concern. Regardless of race, socioeconomic background, or language spoken in the home, respondents to First 5’s 2009 Needs Assessment routinely ranked Nutrition and Fitness among their top 5 needs, as well.

“When you have families that make less than \$30,000 and families that make more than \$75,000 expressing the same need repeatedly, you know you’ve identified a prime target,” says First 5 Commissioner, and Director of Inyo County Health and Human Services Jean Turner. “Giving children better nutrition and fitness resources is something our entire community can rally around, and something all families can benefit from.”

Parents interested in promoting healthy nutrition and an active lifestyle to our community, will also have the chance to sign up for the Families Understanding Nutrition and fitness (F.U.N.) Team on Monday, the 17<sup>th</sup>, as well. Interested grandparents, caregivers, and educators are also encouraged to drop by the van, or to call Jody at 873-6453 in the First 5 office.

“When you see so many happy faces laughing and jumping around, you hate to think that between the time they enter kindergarten to middle school, statistics show that almost one in every three will become overweight,” says Turner. “The health risks and the health costs associated with that are staggering, but it is the personal cost that we can’t accept and must change for their benefit.”