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# news release

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **The Wellmark Foundation Supports Body Mass Index Surveillance System for Youth**

**(DES MOINES, IOWA)** – A \$64,428 two-year grant from The Wellmark Foundation will allow the Iowa Department of Public Health to begin developing a new body mass index (BMI) surveillance system designed to prevent childhood obesity.

The *Surveillance of Body Mass Index Among Iowa 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Students* will create and pilot a sustainable statewide system to monitor BMI among Iowa youth, says Catherine Lillehoj, Ph.D., Epidemiologist, Iowa Department of Public Health. “The Bureau of Nutrition and Health Promotion and the Oral Health Bureau will collaborate to measure the height and weight of Iowa’s elementary school children during required oral health screenings,” explains Lillehoj.

According to Lillehoj, dental hygienists conducting oral health screenings will receive training on how to measure and calculate body mass index. This collaboration will allow the bureaus to share resources and work together to support oral health and obesity prevention in youth.

The BMI surveillance system will be piloted with a sample of 1,200 third grade students in 26 elementary schools across the state, which will align with Iowa’s Title V Child Health Center regions. Implementation of the system for all Iowa elementary students is the long-term goal of the project.

The Iowa Department of Education and Title V Maternal and Child Health agencies across Iowa will also collaborate on the project. For more information on the *Surveillance of Body Mass Index Among Iowa 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Students*, contact Catherine Lillehoj at [clilleho@idph.state.ia.us](mailto:clilleho@idph.state.ia.us) or 515-281-7689.

The Wellmark Foundation has provided nearly \$14.7 million to fund 406 health-related grants in Iowa and South Dakota since 1997, including \$1,739,233 this cycle. “The Wellmark Foundation collaborates with non-profit and governmental organizations in Iowa and South Dakota to positively impact the health outcomes of individuals and communities in our states,” says Matthew McGarvey, director of The Wellmark Foundation. “We are happy to fund this grant that will provide a better picture of childhood obesity prevalence and uniquely engage oral health professionals in the process,” says McGarvey.

The Wellmark Foundation is a private, non-profit foundation created by Wellmark, Inc., doing business as Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Iowa. Due to the Foundation's recent significant support toward disaster relief efforts, the timeline for the second 2008 community responsive grant cycle has been modified. Letters of Interest (LOIs) are now due on September 23, 2008. Learn more about this funding opportunity during a grant applicant teleconference on July 21, 2008. For teleconference and LOI details, visit the Foundation's Web site at [www.wellmark.com/foundation](http://www.wellmark.com/foundation). Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield and The Wellmark Foundation are independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.