

NEWS RELEASE
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Health Department to launch ‘Willow Comes to WIC’ program to increase fruit, vegetable consumption among children

(Lawrence, KS) – The Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department will launch a new “Willow Comes to WIC” program March 2 to teach young children and their families about the importance of eating fruits and vegetables. The launch is in conjunction with National Nutrition Month.

The Health Department’s Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, commonly called WIC, received a \$1,000 grant to provide the program during the next year. The program includes a bunny puppet named Willow, which appeals to children. Staff members, along with Willow, provide 15-minute nutrition lessons, which will have a different theme each month. Lessons will be provided in the Health Department’s clinic waiting room and by appointment for the approximately 1,500 families enrolled in WIC. Lessons also will be given during community events.

Each lesson will be taught using songs, rhymes and stories. The children will get to explore food with magnifying glasses, touch it and taste it. They’ll also help create a healthy snack or meal with their families. Additionally, parents will learn when fruits and vegetables are in season, and how to cut and properly store them. “A lot of families are afraid to buy things they think their kids may not eat when they have limited funds because they don’t want to waste food,” said WIC Coordinator Jolene Croxell, a registered nurse. “So, seeing the kids trying and liking something new may get parents to expand what they buy at the store.”

Encouraging children to eat more fruits and vegetables is a national public health priority because the foods provide essential vitamins, minerals and fiber. Dietary guidelines recommend that children eat at least one cup each of fruit and vegetables a day. The amount needed increases with age and activity level. In 2007-2010, 60 percent of children ages 1-18 did not meet fruit intake recommendations and 93 percent did not meet vegetable recommendations, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study.

The first “Willow Comes to WIC” nutrition lessons will be 1-3 p.m. March 2 in the clinic waiting room, 200 Maine St.