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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

***First Youth Fitness Study by Legislative
District Maps California's Youth Health Crisis***

Sacramento, CA, December 12, 2002... Legislators got a wake-up call this morning when a landmark study was released evaluating the health of California children. The study analyzed two key indicators of health (fitness and body weight) in California's fifth, seventh and ninth graders by Assembly District. It portrays a statewide youth population that is overweight and unfit and pinpoints key legislative districts in the midst of a youth fitness crisis.

"This study should be a wake-up call for everyone concerned about the health of California's children – from parents and teachers to public health experts and members of the Legislature," said State Assembly Speaker Herb Wesson (D-Culver City).

According to the study, *An Epidemic: Overweight and Unfit Children in California Assembly Districts*, produced by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy (CCPHA), nearly 40 percent of public school children tested throughout the state are unfit. The survey also looked at weight, which showed equally dismal statistics indicating that one in four students is overweight. And while no single Assembly District in the state performed well, the analysis pointed to a shocking concentration of overweight and unfit children in certain regions of the state. Eight of the nine Assembly Districts with the highest percentages of both overweight and unfit children are located in Los Angeles County.

"This is a crisis facing every region in California," says Dr. Harold Goldstein, CCPHA executive director. "It's true that some Assembly Districts did worse than others, with Los Angeles County being of particular concern, but if districts were graded for their performance, a 'C' would have been the highest mark earned."

The CCPHA study analyzed data from the 2001 California Physical Fitness Test, which was administered to fifth, seventh and ninth grade public school students, and reported the information by Assembly District. Based on recommendations from a CCPHA scientific panel consisting of eight nationally-respected experts in physical education and nutrition, the study examined both aerobic capacity and body weight portions of the test.

In its recommendations, the CCPHA urges both the Legislature and Governor to take immediate, aggressive steps to stem the tide of this epidemic. It recommends, among other things, that a state law mandating physical education for California's public school students be enforced, that SB 19 nutrition standards be implemented in all schools (K-12) and that legislative hearings be held to examine the impact advertising to children has on the epidemic.

Given the epidemic levels of childhood overweight and physical inactivity recorded throughout the state, the implications of this study are staggering. Not only are pediatricians facing a rash of weight and fitness-related diseases that were unheard of among children a generation ago but these same children will face an unprecedented risk of chronic diseases later in life.

The CCPHA is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization founded by the California Public Health Association-North and the Southern California Public Health Association. Funding for the study was provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Copies of the study, policy brief and Assembly district fact sheets are available at the CCPHA Web site at: <http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org>.