MARTINEZ -- All county health services vending machines will serve only healthful snacks starting next year, a further advance by Contra Costa supervisors in the battle against obesity.

Supervisors agreed Tuesday that beverages and snacks in vending machines at the county's hospital and clinics will have to meet specific nutritional guidelines.

Profits from vending machine sales are used in obesity prevention programs.

"We need to keep an eye toward expanding this to all county vending machines," said Supervisor John Gioia, who introduced the order. Health services has 36 vending machines on its properties.

In 2004, supervisors voted to require 50 percent of all snacks and beverages in county vending machines to be healthful.

Gioia introduced the requirement after his pregnant wife was on break from jury duty at the Richmond courthouse and could not find a nutritious snack in the county health services building next door.

"Every single item in the health clinic was junk food," he said.

Monterey and Los Angeles counties also have started healthful vending machine mandates in their health services buildings.

The county extended the bidding period for vendors when Supervisor Susan Bonilla, of Concord, said she worried that the 10 vendors currently servicing the machines would not have enough time to adjust and submit bids.

Nearly half the children who visit Contra Costa's health services hospital or clinics are either overweight or obese, according to the department.

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