

Global Child Nutrition Forum: New Zealand Schools

Introduction

New Zealand is known for the All Blacks, Lord of the Rings, kiwi fruit and sheep! It is also a land of beautiful and changing landscapes with mountain ranges, lush rain forests, beaches, glaciers and fiords. NZ has a diverse multi-cultural population of 4 million people. 2000 ethnicity school data shows NZ European or Pakeha students make up around 64% of the school population, Maori 20%, Pacific Island 8% and Asian 6%.

Background

National Children's Nutrition Survey

The 2002 Children's Nutrition Survey was a school-based survey that sampled 3275 children aged 5-14 years. In general younger children had better food and nutrient intakes than older children and were less likely to be overweight or obese. Using international cut-offs, 21.3% were overweight and 9.8% obese. Pacific children's levels of overweight/obesity were 62%, Maori 41% and NZ European and others 24%.

84% of children brought most of the food they consumed at school from home. They were more likely to bring food from home if they were younger.

78% of parents/caregivers reported that their household could always afford to eat properly. For Maori and Pacific children these figures were 64% and 47% respectively indicating food security is a greater issue in these households.

NZ Schools

A key area of learning in The Health and Physical Education Curriculum is Food and Nutrition. There are some guiding documents for schools to use in this area however the emphasis placed on this subject varies between schools. There is an expectation that by year 8 children will have had practical cooking experiences.

There is no national school nutrition/feeding programme in New Zealand. Most schools provide a canteen or lunch order service and increasingly primary schools in areas of high deprivation are supplying funded breakfasts and lunches. The nutritional quality of food supplied varies between schools. Most commonly schools may have a policy around consumption of soft drinks and sweets but few schools have consistent policy or guidelines around issues of using food for fundraising, rewards, sponsorship and school canteens.

Less healthy choices often tend to dominate school food sales due to school food services being operated for profit, lack of facilities to prepare fresh food and lack of school management support.

Support for schools

The Heart Foundation has an award based *School Food Programme* that provides schools with guidelines to improve healthy food choices and also includes elements of health promotion. There are many examples of individual school successes using this model integrated within the Health Promoting Schools framework. Public Health Nurses work in schools and use the expertise of Nutrition Health Promoters to help facilitate change.

Public Health Units produce resources to meet local school needs such as the *How much sugar is in drinks?* poster and *Healthy Nibbles* which is a monthly nutrition and physical activity update service provided via email designed for inclusion in school newsletters. *The Food Challenge* teaching resource was developed to support curriculum delivery. Canteen meetings are held to give school food service staff an opportunity to network and to be updated on new products and nutrition issues relevant to the school setting.

Future Direction

The New Zealand Health Strategy (Ministry of Health, 2000) identifies 13 priority population health objectives. Of these objectives 7 are related to improving nutrition and physical activity.

There is an urgent need for consistent national guidelines supported by the Ministry of Education to support and encourage schools to develop a health-promoting environment in terms of nutrition.

Healthy Eating – Healthy Action: Oranga Kai – Oranga Pumau: Implementation Plan 2004-2010 (Ministry of Health)

The aim of this plan is to have a coordinated approach across all sectors to address the issues around poor nutrition, physical inactivity and obesity. Some of the priority areas identified for schools are:

- The Ministry of Health and the Education sector are being encouraged to work collaboratively to explore policy options to improve the physical activity and nutrition environments in schools.
- Improved access to healthy food in preschools, Kohanga Reo, schools and Kura Kaupapa Maori, with high numbers of high need students.
- Promotion of vegetables and fruit in the school setting.
- Investigate options for improving food security in low-income families with children.
- Increase knowledge and skills of teachers to deliver nutrition and physical activity in the curriculum.

Glossary

Kohanga Reo	Maori pre school
Kura Kaupapa Maori	Maori school teaching Maori values, language, traditions and aspirations.
Pakeha	New Zealand European

References

Ministry of Education 1999. *Health and Physical Education in the New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.

Ministry of Health 2003. *NZ Food NZ Children: Key Results of the 2002 National Children's Nutrition Survey*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Ministry of Health 2004. *Healthy Eating – Healthy Action: Oranga Kai – Oranga Pumau. Implementation Plan: 2004-2010*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Carter. M.A. and Swinburn. B. (2004) *Measuring the 'obesogenic' food environment in New Zealand primary schools*. Health Promotion International, 19, 15-20.

Ministry of Health 2000. *The New Zealand Health Strategy*. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

Ministry of Education. July 2000 School Statistics: Data Management and Analysis Division, Ministry of Education.

Prepared by:

Andrea Creighton
Health Promoter/Dietitian
Nutrition and Physical Activity Team
Community and Public Health
Christchurch
New Zealand
Email: andrea.creighton@cph.co.nz
Ph: 64 3 379 9480 ext:788