

## Advancing physical activity and healthy eating in schools

### What we know

The CARICOM Heads of Government Declaration on NCDs has reinforced the critical need for physical education in schools and physical activity and healthy eating in all settings.

The health, nutrition and physical activity-related habits developed in our childhoods are likely to influence our behaviour throughout our lifetime and getting these things right at an early stage will reap benefits for individuals, families and communities. There is plenty of work to be done.

- Childhood obesity exceeds 10% in 7 of 11 countries with data. (24% of girls in the Bahamas are obese).
- This obesity is being driven in part by the increased availability of high-fat, high-sugar fast foods and sugar-sweetened beverages.
- Some fast food outlets target children through advertising and supplying branded school materials.
- Less than a third of school children aged 13-15 get the recommended level of physical activity.
- Alcohol use among 13-15-year-olds exceeds 40% in 11 out of 20 countries, with tobacco use approaching adult rates.
- According to the evaluation of the Port of Spain Declaration, commitments related to schools have among the lowest levels of implementation.
- The evaluation found that a minority of Member States report policies in place to promote healthy eating in schools (six) or mandatory physical activity in schools (nine). It is not clear whether these policies are actually being implemented or having any impact.

### What we can do

Our children have the right to live in a non-obesogenic environment.

#### At the policy level

- Ban advertising, promotion and sponsorship related to unhealthy foods that target children.
- Review, update and standardise the Health and Family Life Education curriculum to include NCD risks.
- Make physical activity mandatory from pre-primary to tertiary level.
- Promote a wider range of physical activities in school programmes.
- Develop an overarching regional school nutrition policy; introducing school feeding programmes and encouraging more water consumption.
- Conduct an evaluation of the nutritional value of typical school meals.



## In schools

- Develop school health programmes that encourage healthy eating, physical activity and zero tolerance for tobacco and alcohol. Involve parents and the wider community.
- Caribbean Wellness Day (the second Saturday in September) can be used as a launch pad for many of the suggested interventions and activities below.
  - o *To promote healthy diets*
    - Introduce healthy food options in school canteens/among vendors.
    - Educate food vendors, parents and students on healthy (and tasty) food options. Let students have a say in what they want to eat and drink.
    - Train school canteen staff in child nutrition.
    - Introduce a wider range of foods at school and at home, including ground provisions, fruit and vegetables.
    - Organise healthy eating challenges/competitions for the children to complete.
    - Ensure students have access to water throughout the day.
    - Plant vegetable/kitchen gardens in schools and let the children look after them.
    - Use 'creative' and home economics classes to teach children how to make healthy snacks and easy meals.
  - o *To promote physical activity*
    - Organise physical activity challenges for students that are inclusive and fun, involving children irrespective of their physical abilities. (And allow sweaty children back into the classroom!).
    - Promote 60 minutes of activity a day.
    - Hold after-school exercise clubs (aerobics, line dancing etc).
    - Organise debates/song competitions on healthy lifestyle topics.
    - Ask approved and relevant private sector companies to donate branded sports equipment.

## A really good example



### *British Virgin Islands*

In BVI a ground-breaking initiative to improve the level of nutrition and physical activity among hundreds of the nation's primary school children was launched in October 2015. The behaviour change intervention, implemented by the Ministry of Education and Culture, promotes five targeted daily behaviours, like consuming a wide variety of foods; eating

breakfast, fruits and vegetables; reducing intake of fats, salts and sugary snacks and drinks; and engaging in physical activity. Schools are encouraged to find creative ways of reinforcing positive changes, such as healthy lunch contests, walking and cycling clubs, adventure outings and the development of school gardens. According to one teacher involved, Shaniqua Henley-Vanterpool, the initiative is very welcome. "Students will be able to make better choices. The programme will help them to understand that having a healthy lifestyle is part diet and part physical activity."

For more information go to: <http://www.onecaribbeanhealth.org/bvi-striving-for-healthier-happier-pupils/>

Visit our website at [www.onecaribbeanhealth.org](http://www.onecaribbeanhealth.org) for much more on NCDs and accelerating action in the NCD response.