

SODIUM REDUCTION | New York

Reducing Sodium in School Meals Is Elementary

January 2013



Problem

Children across the United States consume more sodium than recommended. Too much sodium increases the risk for high blood pressure. Many children eat one or more meals at school, and these meals can contribute high amounts of sodium.

Project

As part of a 3-year sodium reduction project, the Broome County Health Department and Broome Tioga Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) school meals program launched an initiative to reduce sodium in school lunches for 20,000 elementary school students.

Outcomes

The average sodium content per school meal was reduced by 20%, from 1,500 milligrams (mg) in 2010 to 1,200 mg in 2012. The program expects an additional 200 mg reduction in its third year.

Resources

- Broome County Health Department
www.gobroomecounty.com/hd
- Broome Tioga BOCES Rock on Café School Meals Program
www.rockoncafe.com/Elementary/home.cfm

For more information please contact Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

1600 Clifton Road NE, Atlanta, GA 30333
Telephone: 1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)/
TTY: 1-888-232-6348
E-mail: cdcinfo@cdc.gov

www.cdc.gov

Statement of Problem: Most American adults and children consume more than the recommended daily amount of sodium, which can lead to high blood pressure. High blood pressure increases the risk for heart attack and stroke. These problems are of particular concern in Broome County, New York, where mortality rates from cardiovascular disease and self-reported rates of high blood pressure are higher than the state average. Poor diet in childhood can help lay a foundation for health problems later in life. For the 20,000 elementary school students in Broome and neighboring Tioga County who eat school-prepared lunch, these meals can be a significant source of sodium intake.

Project Description: In 2010, Broome County received support from the New York State Department of Health's 3-year, CDC-funded **Sodium Reduction in Communities Program** grant. The goal of the project was to create more demand for and availability of lower sodium foods. Major components of the project included collaborations with schools, grocery stores, and senior meals programs as well as a media campaign now in development.

As part of this project, the Broome County Health Department and the school meals program of the Broome Tioga Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) built on previous collaborations to reduce sodium in lunches served to students across 15 school districts. The project began with a menu analysis to determine which menu items should be targeted for reduction. The school meals program worked closely with food industry partners to expose students and staff to lower sodium options. Annual food shows provided an opportunity for vendors to showcase lower-sodium products to school food service personnel. Monthly lower sodium taste tests with food service staff and students helped build support for new items across the school community. Throughout the program, a Broome Tioga BOCES registered dietitian and staff conducted nutritional and cost analyses to ensure that new food choices fit school budgets and sodium reduction goals.

Outcomes: The project succeeded in reducing sodium in lunches served in Broome and Tioga elementary school cafeterias. In 2010, the average school lunch contained 1,500 mg of sodium, but only 2 years later, that amount was 20% lower, with an average of 1,200 mg of sodium. A further reduction to 1,000 mg of sodium per lunch is expected by the end of the 3-year project.

The dietitian for the school meals program believes the initiative was successful thanks to its gradual approach to sodium reduction and emphasis on student taste-testing to find lower sodium foods that students would accept.

Conclusions: This project demonstrates that schools can work together and with partners to find affordable lunch options that are lower in sodium and acceptable to students. Collaborations like this one between the food industry, county health officials, and school community stakeholders—students, parents, administrators, and school food service personnel—can lead to real reductions in children's sodium intake and, by extension, set them on a path for long-term heart health. The Broome County Health Department will continue to work with BOCES to further reduce sodium in school meals and to meet the U.S. Department of Agriculture's sodium standards for the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs.

