

CDC *Vital Signs* Town Hall Teleconference  
Q&A

School's in Session: Taking Steps to Reduce Sodium in Children's Diets  
September 9, 2014  
2:00 pm (EDT)

Dr. Dan Baden: All right, thank you very much for those excellent presentations. I'd like to remind everyone that you can get in queue to ask a question by asking pressing star 1. Say your name when prompted and you'll be announced into the conference by the operator when it's your turn to ask your question.

I encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity to share your own strategies or the lessons you've learned, ask our experts here, and share your success stories.

So to start us off a question I have would be what do you expect the impact will be from the new national nutrition standards based on the analysis in the MMWR?

Dr. Mary Cogswell: Well this is Mary Cogswell. And based on an analysis in the MMWR if there is no replacement from other sources the sodium intake among US school-age children could be reduced by an average of about 75 to 150 milligrams per day and about 220 to 440 milligrams on days children consume school meals.

And more importantly some of the tips that you've seen here from school lunch programs could be applied across the board.

So as we showed earlier the majority of sodium intake among school-aged kids comes from foods that are purchased from schools and from fast food pizza restaurants.

Dr. Dan Baden: Okay great. I guess along the same line how would you balance high sodium entrées to meet the target of the day?

Dr. Robert Lewis: This is Robert Lewis. And I think that my colleague Heather Plain, I think she hit upon that earlier where she balanced the pudding with the high sodium entree.

Another way that you can do that is to just menu items that are popular with kids that are just a little bit lower in sodium however things that they recognize.

So for example I had mentioned instead of having a breaded chicken patty an unbreaded chicken patty and serve that with barbecue sauce and only one per student.

You can also do that by limiting condiments. Condiments are secret carriers of sodium. So we need to be sure that we give students only one per each.

So when we have menu items that are high in sodium for example, chicken patties or something along those lines we want to balance that with a fresh fruit or vegetable. Because, as you know most of those fresh fruits and vegetables have almost none as far sodium is concerned.

Dr. Dan Baden: Very good, again if you've got any questions press star 1 and record your name and we'll get you into the queue.

To continue another question I have -- and maybe this just shows my ignorance -- but I'm not overly clear on who controls the menu within schools. Is that done locally? Is that done nationally? How do schools determine what they're going to serve on a day-to-day and week-to-week basis?

Heather Plain: This is Heather Plain. The USDA sends the guidelines out to the state department which then sends it to the local school districts.

It's really up to the local school district to define the menu and to create the food or produce the food that meets the guidelines. And that leaves us the flexibility to

serve our students food that they are familiar with and that they like while still meeting those USDA guidelines.

Dr. Dan Baden: And I really like the idea of you letting the students taste test and take that type of approach. Was that successful? Did they actually give input and was it useful in you developing the menu?

Dr. Robert Lewis: Yes that - it is very useful for them and it does make them feel included. And you know, I think sometimes we don't give students enough credit.

They know that there's a childhood obesity epidemic going on right now. And I think with just a little bit of effort and asking them participate in the solution solving - our problem solving process they're more than happy to share their experiences, foods that they have at home, their preferences. And they're always willing to participate in food taste testing events.

Heather Plain: Can I add to that? Well our student committee, they are - they're not shy at all but letting us know what they do and don't like. And their opinions were vital in us selecting the new food that we brought into the schools this year.

Our state department also includes students on our USDA foods panel when we sampled the potential foods for the upcoming year.

And it's interesting to me how the directors will take a vote if they like a product or not and then they'll tell us what the students voted for. And sometimes there's a big disconnect there.

And so it's been really great to have the student input so that we make sure we get them the food that they really do like.

Dr. Dan Baden: I know when I go to school with my kids for lunch it's not overly clear what is healthy food and what is not healthy food.

Do you have any examples of what have been done in other places? I've seen calorie - calories listed on fast food menus up in the DC airport and things like that.

What approaches have school started to take to help educate students so they can start making their own healthy choices?

Dr. Robert Lewis: Well I believe many school districts are posting their nutrition analysis right on their web sites. And many school districts like mine it's available upon request.

And those are requested from us quite often from our registered nurses who monitor students who have diabetes or may - who have high blood pressure or some other type of allergy, food allergy.

And we give those to - and we can give it to any of the parents upon request. But I do know some school districts post it right on their web site these days.

Dr. Dan Baden: Okay any other comments from the rest you?

All right a different question I have is I know that some schools have opened campuses where the students are able to leave the campus during lunch and at other breaks. Are any of your school systems set that - set up that way where it's a very unregulated with regard to lunch? And if so how can you help students make educated choices when they're not in a school cafeteria?

Dr. Robert Lewis: Okay this is Robert Lewis. I'll take the question. My school district's preschool through eighth grade so we do have closed campuses here.

However there are ways to help students make healthier choices. For example we both have mentioned Nutrition Advisory Councils, NAC clubs.

So when we have students who are telling us what they want and telling us, you know, that they want salad bars it's always best when the students promote healthy eating from within.

Sometimes I think it's a little bit of a strategic thing that directors can do. You know, oh my goodness those kids are demanding a salad bar. Well twist my arm, let me put one out there. You know, there is some strategic marketing that you can do that way.

And, you know, when kids feel empowered by making these decisions and being included in the menu decisions I think that that is one way that you can help them in later in life make the healthy choices.

Dr. Mary Cogswell: And this is Mary Cogswell. I'll add to that as well. You know what children eat now determines their eating habits later in life. And as parents we can really help children to make better food choices.

Some of the things that we can do are to be healthy to try to be better models of healthy eating and to choose ourselves fresh fruits and vegetables throughout the day without added salt or sodium or sauces.

When we're eating out we can model behavior to our children as well by asking to see nutrition information on the food menus. And even if we're eating out at a sit-down restaurant to ask that no sodium be added to the salt on our food.

If we take our children grocery shopping we can model behavior by picking up the products and looking at the nutrition labels and comparing those and choosing the one that's a lower sodium choice.

You really have to do that once and then you go back and you can choose that same brand over and over again.

Dr. Dan Baden: So let me follow-up on that example. I know I take my kids to the grocery store with us and we try and do some of that. But I wonder about some of the programs like SNAP or other food type programs? Do they encourage the use of low sodium foods?

Dr. Robert Lewis: It's been my experience that they do. And actually we've signed up with some nutrition education opportunities and grants with them to work with local vendors and to work with the community.

We do have a grant right now that we're working with with Los Angeles County Department of Education also with the city of Pasadena Health Department.

And we are going to be working with local grocery stores actually next week going to them and showing them some examples of healthier foods that we might ask them to put on end caps, ask them to do some behavioral economics by placing healthier foods at eye levels for the students or for kids so that they can see healthier choices and make them - make those choices.

As far as the school district is concerned we've started this year the Healthier School Lunch Movement. And that's something that's been put out by Cornell University.

And it's a way of arranging the foods where healthier choices are within reach and the least healthier choices are out of reach.

For example, moving the white milk or non-flavored milk closer and the chocolate milk towards the back for example, putting fruits and vegetables on both ends of the lines so the kids, you know, they have the different choices. But we're just kind of coaxing them into making the healthier choices.

Dr. Dan Baden: Those sound like good ideas.

With the planning and policies you've implemented in your school districts does that impact snacks and vending machines as well? Do you have access to that in your schools?

Heather Plain: This is Heather Plain again. We have this year is a new - the Smarts Snacks in schools has been in effect since July 1. And that has been impacting us.

We have not had very big regulation in our schools. And I know with the awards that Robert has received their schools are very much on track to limit those snacks in school that are sold to their children and so it's something new for us where we are looking at that Smarts Snacks for the entire environment in the school district.

Dr. Robert Lewis: Yes thank you very much Heather. And I will say that the state of California has helped us a great deal too. We had healthy - well we had restrictions put on our snack foods a number of years ago here in California.

So when the federal regulations came through this past July it really was pretty easy for Californians to go ahead and put those into place.

California regulations on snack foods are still more restrictive than the federal restrictions are. So it's, you know, it's governments working together with school districts helping to create these environments for kids that makes it worthwhile.

Dr. Dan Baden: When I get my monthly statements for my kid's lunches I find that they are often eating breakfast as well.

Do the policies you're implementing and the guidelines and regulations that came out in July impact school breakfast as well?

Dr. Robert Lewis: Yes they do. There are three different targets, three different sodium targets. There's one that just came into place 2014-2015. There's one for '17-'18 and

there's another one for 2022–2023. Wow that seems really far out there. But there are regulations that Heather and I have to meet.

And so for this school year for lunch we've already met those regulations. We're at 1,135 milligrams of sodium per lunch. And the target is 1,230.

Then for breakfast to answer your question, the target right now for us is 540 milligrams for K through 5, which is what we follow. And our average right now is 478 milligrams per breakfast.

So we're right in line there. And then for the next step for '17–18 for breakfast we're already at that goal there.

So we do have to follow those guidelines. That is part of the federal regulations. And since they're paying the bill we need to follow those regs.

Dr. Dan Baden: Okay thank you. And one last time if you have any questions you would like to ask or any examples from your own areas that you'd like to provide please press star 1 and we'll get you into the queue.

As that's happening I'm going to start wrapping up the call. Would any of you presenters like to say anything else before we close, any final comments or anything?

Dr. Mary Cogswell: Well this is Mary Cogswell. I'm just thankful for the presentations from the school programs. It's going to take all of us working together, the schools, communities, parents, and food manufacturers to reduce sodium intake in children.

And that can make a big difference in their blood pressure and as they become adults in their risk of heart disease and stroke.

Dr. Dan Baden: All right any other comments?

Dr. Robert Lewis: This is Robert Lewis. And I would just say if you want to look at any real-life examples of what I've discussed here you can go to [www.elmontecityschooldistrict.org](http://www.elmontecityschooldistrict.org) and look at the nutrition area and also nutrition education area and get lots of ideas there.

Dr. Dan Baden: All right, one last check with the operator, any questions in the queue?

Coordinator: Yes sir we do. We do have a question. Question comes from Deirdre. Your line is open.

Deirdre: Hi. I think Dr. Lewis mentioned something about vendors. I wonder if vendors and distributors are being more responsive to requests for low-sodium products?

Dr. Robert Lewis: I would have to say the answer is yes. I went to the National Show for School Nutrition Association in Boston this summer and I was amazed by the hundreds and hundreds of different products that meet the new standards.

Vendors are really stepping forward both on a national, regional, and local level to meet the new standards in very creative ways.

Dr. Dan Baden: All right, very good. Anything else Deidre?

Deidre: No thank you. I appreciate the answer.

Dr. Dan Baden: All right then any final questions in the queue operator?

Coordinator: No sir, I'm showing no further questions.

Dr. Dan Baden: All right. So I want to thank all the presenters as well as all the participants. I know I've learned a great deal, opened my eyes to what my kids are going through at school.

But we do these every month. And it would be very helpful if you could give us some feedback on how we can improve them.

So if you have any comments about how we present these town halls or if you have suggestions or anything please send them to [ostltsfeedback@cdc.gov](mailto:ostltsfeedback@cdc.gov). That's OSTLTS feedback, all one word at cdc dot gov.

We hope you'll be able to join us for next month's Town Hall call on October 14 when we'll focus on motor vehicle safety. And I want to thank you all again one last time and that's it for today's call. Goodbye.

Coordinator: Thank you. And this does conclude today's conference. All parties may disconnect.