

NEW MOVE TO HELP REGION'S CHILDREN FIGHT THE FLAB

Cookery clubs to be set up in schools

A new drive to tackle child obesity and help cut the risks of the region's youngsters developing serious illness was announced today by Public Health Minister Melanie Johnson.

Working with 42 schools in the North West region, the Healthier Cookery Clubs pilot project will teach children how to cook healthy and tasty meals and also increase their awareness and understanding of the importance of a balanced diet, food hygiene and safety. Activities will encourage family and community participation.

It's just one of eight different projects being piloted across England under the £2.2m Food in Schools programme.

The announcement comes at a time of increasing concern about child obesity. Figures show that one in seven 15 year olds and one in twelve 6 year olds are obese.

Lessons learnt from the programme, covering over 500 schools, will be drawn together to develop a nationwide school approach to promote healthy eating in children and help schools, teachers and education authorities develop similar schemes in the longer-term.

Melanie Johnson said:

"Children who are overweight or obese face greater risks of developing serious illness later in life, such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

"Obesity itself is responsible for 31,000 premature deaths each year. It's vital we tackle this problem before it's too late.

"We said we'd help children to eat more healthily and through programmes like the £44m National School Fruit Scheme nearly one million 4-6 year olds are now receiving a free piece of fruit each school day.

"This new drive builds further on these commitments and is fantastic news for schools across England including the [North West]."

The Food in Schools programme has strong links with other initiatives to reduce obesity, improve long-term health and establish healthy eating habits such as 5 A DAY, the National Healthy Schools Standard, the National School Fruit Scheme

and the Food and Health Action Plan. The pilot programmes will start in early 2004.

Notes to editors:

1. The Cookery Clubs project:

- ContinYou will work with around 40 schools to develop effective and fun ways to improve young people's cooking skills and knowledge about nutritionally balanced diets through the medium of cookery clubs. Activities will encourage family and community participation.
- In recent years out of school hours learning has proved to be one of the most effective forms of informal learning employed by schools, the best examples proving to be both successful and in high demand.
- Cookery clubs have proved an excellent means of increasing awareness of nutrition and healthy diet among participants. In particular, clubs have proved to be inclusive and have allowed schools to approach sensitive subjects such as cultural diversity and the importance of hygiene in food preparation. The act of following recipes may also lead to an increase in literacy and numeracy.

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2. The £2.2 million Food in Schools (FiS) Programme is jointly run by the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills. By introducing this Programme, which follows children through the school day, we will lay the foundations to help prevent obesity and disease later in life. FiS is one part of the Food and Health Action Plan (FAHAP), due mid 2004, which aims to achieve a healthier diet for the people of England.
3. The Department of Health strand of FiS is made up of eight pilot projects. These are outside of, but complement, the formal curriculum. Contracts have been awarded to seven organisations across England to pilot these initiatives with a focus on developing best practice approaches that schools can implement to promote and encourage healthier eating.
4. Each Government region is 'hosting' a pilot project with approximately 500 schools across England involved. Regional momentum is growing, with many stakeholders, including healthy schools co-ordinators, children, caterers, teachers, health professionals and local business working together to make it happen. Each project builds on good practice and consults children, schools, caterers and other key stakeholders on issues such as healthier product choice, marketing, barriers to success, curriculum links and resource issues.

Stakeholder involvement and input is vital to the success of the Programme with sustainability and ease of implementation also key.

5. Results of all eight FiS projects will be brought together in a 'whole school approach' in late 2004. This will be disseminated from the beginning of 2005 to enable schools and wider stakeholders across England to develop sustainable in-house strategies for improving the nutrition and diet of children. The output will be of particular value to schools working towards the healthy eating strand of the National Healthy Schools Standard.
6. In the DfES strand of the Food in Schools programme, primary and secondary schools are encouraged to look at all aspects of food during the school day through an 'audit' and to develop whole school food policies. Schools are also encouraged to set up local food partnerships, where secondary food specialists train and support their primary colleagues, helping them to work towards the National Healthy Schools Standard.
8. Facts and figures about obesity:
 - according to the Health Development Agency, fifteen per cent of 15 year olds and 8.5 per cent of six year olds are classed as obese;
 - between 1996 and 2001, the proportion of overweight children aged 6-15 years old increased by 7 per cent.
 - a can of soft drink or a chocolate bar can have 6-7 teaspoons of sugar;
 - it takes 90 mins of running to burn off the calories contained in a large chocolate bar;
 - the International Obesity Task Force warned earlier this month that over 40 per cent of the UK population could be obese 'within a generation';
 - in 2001, 23 per cent of women and 21 per cent of men were obese, compared to 8 per cent of women and 6 per cent of men in 1980;
 - the National Audit Office predicts that by 2010 obesity will cost some £3.6 billion a year in England;

According to the Sodexo School Meals and Lifestyle Survey 2002 of 1300 8-16 year olds and their parents:

- £433 million was spent on food and drink going to and from school, compared with £365 million in 2000. This went on sweets (42 per cent), crisps (33 per cent), chocolate (28 per cent), fizzy drinks (28 per cent).
- Eight per cent of children have nothing to eat before school, and this rises to 18 per cent for 15-16 year olds and 21 per cent for 15-16 year old girls.
- The most popular food items requested by children at school are ones which can be "hand held" such as pizza and burgers, fresh fruit and sandwiches.

- Thirty seven per cent of children said they would select healthy foods at school if there was a better choice available and 18 per cent wanted the taste of the healthy food options at school to be improved.
- Almost half the children said their school encouraged healthy eating and this rose to 67 per cent where there was a school food committee. But only 12 per cent of schools had such a forum.
- Over half of parents (53 per cent) said they did not get enough, or in some cases any, information about school meals.