The global crisis of childhood obesity

- Globally, obesity and overweight affect over 220 million children between the ages of 5 and 18; in 10 years, that’s projected to rise to nearly 270 million.¹ ²
- The obesity rate among Jamaican children aged 13-15 years has increased by 68.3% over the period 2010-2017 with the rate in boys almost doubling (94% increase) and rate in the girls increasing by 47%.³

Childhood obesity and sugary drink consumption

- Excess calories from sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) are a significant contributor to the global rise in obesity and diabetes. SSBs are a leading risk factor for many non-communicable diseases (NCDs) especially obesity, type II diabetes, heart disease and tooth decay.
- More than two thirds of Jamaican teens (13-17) consume carbonated soft drinks one or more times per day.³ Drinking just one sugary drink a day increases the likelihood of being overweight by 55% for children.⁴

Obesity causes many health problems for children

- Obesity increases the risk of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, peer bullying, eating disorders, and poor school performance.⁵ ⁶ ⁷ Obesity in childhood often follows kids into adolescence and adulthood,⁸ ⁹ meaning their future is more likely to include diabetes, heart disease, and cancer.¹⁰ ¹¹

Obesity and an unhealthy school environment

- Schools are meant to provide a healthy environment for children’s minds and bodies. Children spend many hours at school and eat a large portion of their meals there. Schools are also an important source of food via school meal programs, particularly for low-income children.
- Providing and promoting unhealthy foods within and around schools contributes to poor nutrition and childhood obesity.¹⁰
- Unhealthy school food environments prevent children from making good eating decisions and learning healthy food habits.¹² Easy access to unhealthy foods in and around schools, along with aggressive marketing for those foods, correlates with students consuming more of those unhealthy foods.¹³ ¹⁴

BLUEPRINT FOR A HEALTHY SCHOOL FOOD ENVIRONMENT

Healthy school food environments need strong, effective policies; components should include:

1. **High standards for school meal programs.** Evidence-based standards for healthy school meals limiting unhealthy foods while promoting inclusion of nutritious foods can improve children’s diet within and outside of schools.¹⁵

2. **Restrict the sale of junk food and sugary drinks in schools.** A policy in Boston, Massachusetts that banned all sugary drink sales in public schools led to a significant reduction in students’ total consumption of sugary drinks,¹⁶ and the state’s 2012 implementation of nutrition standards for competitive foods sold in schools statewide has also been associated with significant decreases in students’ sugar consumption, both during and after school.¹⁷

3. **Restrictions on marketing of unhealthy foods on school grounds.** Promotion of unhealthy foods and beverages on school grounds through direct advertising, event branding and sponsorship, contractual vending and food service agreements reinforces unhealthy choices, undermines messages to students about healthy eating,¹⁸ ¹⁹ and encourages a future generation of consumers loyal to unhealthy food and beverage brands.²⁰ ²¹ Chile, Poland, Spain, Uruguay and certain municipalities in Brazil have successfully implemented restrictions on marketing and promotion of products that do not meet nutrition standards for pre-schools and primary and secondary schools.²² ²³

4. **Limits on sales and marketing of unhealthy foods and drinks near schools.** A study in Baltimore, Maryland showed that less exposure to unhealthy foods within proximity to schools reduces weight gain²⁶, while a survey of food vendors within 100 meters of elementary schools in Mexico...
found that children attending schools with the highest concentration of mobile food vendors had higher body mass index.\textsuperscript{13}

**Access to healthy alternatives.** Nutritious food should be made available on or near school grounds to keep healthy diets and send messages about healthy eating. Providing access to safe and fresh drinking water reduces consumption of sugary drinks while increasing water consumption. A study of over 1 million students in New York City showed that the installation of “water jets” in school cafeterias was associated with a significant reduction in students’ likelihood of being overweight.\textsuperscript{26}

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**References**