EatSmart at School: From Survey to Practice

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Background & Objectives

With an increasing trend of obesity among primary school students, promoting healthy eating habits has become one of the important initiatives of the Department of Health (DH). In this light, a territory-wide EatSmart@school.hk Campaign was launched in 2006. Following the baseline survey in schools in 2006, another survey was commissioned in 2008 to deepen our understanding on the knowledge, attitudes and practices among students, parents and schools towards healthy eating during this period.

Methods

The 2008 survey was a cross-sectional study conducted in primary schools in Hong Kong in January. Standardised questionnaires were used to collect information from the school management, Primary 4 and 5 students and their parents.

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Received September 26, 2008; accepted October 29, 2008

Results

Fifty-one primary schools were recruited with 9152 (81.9%) students and 8265 (73.9%) parents responding. Most students had good knowledge of healthy eating principles though half of them would still choose less healthy food. Girls were more likely than boys to have adequate intakes of fruit and vegetables, and to participate in healthy eating promotional activities. Majority (78.6%) of responding parents considered nutritional value an important factor influencing food selection and they were generally capable of selecting healthier food items. Over half (61.3% to 92.1%) of the parents supported some form of regulation on school lunch and snack provision. Less educated and lower income parents showed lower levels of understanding and support for healthy eating. About half (52.9%) of the schools developed healthy eating policies whereas one-fifth did not participate in any healthy eating promotional activities. Overall, schools that participated in DH healthy eating promotion programmes showed more encouraging results. Compared with 2006, improvements were seen in students' attitudes and practices as well as parents' support for healthy eating and their tighter regulation.

Conclusion

Compared with 2006, this survey showed that parents and children were more supportive towards healthy eating. Gaps were identified for further programme and research planning.