

# FAQs



## Frequently Asked Questions for Media on the Food and Beverage Classification System

### Why do we need a Food and Beverage Classification System?

The Ministry of Health's 2002 National Children's Survey showed just over half of the 5–14-year-olds surveyed bought at least some of their food from the school canteen, with 5 per cent of children buying most of their food there. Most children do not choose food or drink just because of its nutritional value. They choose it because they like the taste, because it's what their friends are having, 'because it's lunchtime' and because it's what is on offer.

About a quarter of the sugar in New Zealand children's daily diets comes from beverages such as fizzy drinks and nearly as much comes from lollies. Add pies, fried chips and chocolate bars into the mix and you have a diet undesirably high in fat, salt and sugar. Many children do not eat enough vegetables and fruit.

Encouraging healthy food choices early in life can help create lifelong preferences for healthy foods. Some early childhood education (ECE) services and schools already have policies and procedures about what is offered on site to ensure that healthy choices are available, and many more are developing such policies. Implementing the Food and Beverage Classification System will help schools and ECE services identify and offer healthy food choices to children and young people.

### What is the Food and Beverage Classification System?

The Food and Beverage Classification System is a way of classifying foods and beverages that are recommended for sale or provision at schools and ECE services. The system has been designed specifically for foods and beverages children commonly consume in the education setting.

The three-tiered system identifies foods and beverages that are:

#### Everyday foods: appropriate for everyday consumption

Encourage and promote these foods and drinks in your school.

#### Sometimes foods: for restricted provision

Do not let these foods and drinks dominate the choices available, and provide in appropriate serving sizes.

#### Occasional foods: should not be provided

Limit provision of these foods or drinks to about ONE occasion per term.



### What are examples of everyday, sometimes and occasional food and beverages?

A sample canteen menu may include:

- plain water
- reduced-fat milk
- fruit juice
- pizza bread
- toasted sandwiches
- bread-based pies
- soup of the day
- vegetable salad
- assorted sandwiches and wraps
- filled salad rolls
- iceblocks
- frozen yoghurt
- mixed fruit and nuts
- creamed rice
- tuna and cracker combos
- scones
- fruit jelly
- fresh and canned fruit.

Examples of **occasional** foods and drinks include:

- confectionery and chocolate
- deep-fried food
- full-sugar fizzy drinks
- high-fat pastry products.



### Is the Ministry of Health banning foods?

No, the Ministry is not banning foods. It is simply promoting and encouraging consumption of healthy food options in the education setting. Many of those in the food industry are already reformulating their products for inclusion in the **sometimes** category of the Food and Beverage Classification System.

### Is this a traffic light system?

Whilst the food and beverages have been classified into three groups, a traffic light concept was not selected to represent the three groups for the following reasons:

- concerns from external advisory groups about associating 'red' food with 'danger'. This is particularly relevant for children and young people who may be attracted to risk-taking behaviours
- concerns that younger children may translate the message literally and not eat any 'red' foods
- confusion with other promotions such as 'eating by colours' (5+ a day promotion) which promotes eating fruit and vegetables of specific colours, including red
- traffic lights are already used in many other settings, including in behaviour management in classrooms.
- the Ministry of Health's Youth Advisory Group Rise E Tū came up with other innovative ideas (including the **everyday/sometimes/occasional** model) for how this system should look.

### Will food and beverages sold in canteens have labels on them?

No, the classification system is not a labelling system. Instead it is a tool to help schools and ECE services to identify what types of foods and beverages are healthy options.

### How will the Ministry assist canteen and kitchen staff to implement the classification system?

The Food and Beverage Classification System support resources – the *User Guide* and *Catering Guide* – give canteen staff the information they need to implement the Food and Beverage Classification System in their canteen. There are separate resources for schools and ECE services.

The *User Guide* explains the classification system and provides practical advice, such as a sample canteen menu, reading food labels, and basic food information. The *Catering Guide* provides meal ideas and recipes to assist canteen and catering staff provide healthier food and beverages.

A product database listing **everyday** and **sometimes** food products and beverages will be available to canteen staff later in 2007 to assist in choosing these foods and beverages.

### Food is sometimes a source of income for schools. What does this mean for schools when it comes to fundraising chocolates and sausage sizzles?

There is not a ban on selling chocolate as part of fundraising activities, nor is there any ban on sausage sizzles. What it means is that schools should think about other alternatives for fundraising and whether or not these activities send consistent messages to students and the wider community. With input from the wider school community, schools may be able to fundraise using other, innovative ideas. As well, events such as sausage sizzles could be modified by offering alternatives such as healthy burgers or wraps.

Marketing is vital to making financial success of any changes to the school food environment. One way to achieve success is to have significant involvement from students and the wider school community in any planned changes from the beginning of the process. The Ministry of Education will be adding information to the food and nutrition toolkit in schools and ECE services about different fundraising activities to assist schools in this area.



## How does the classification system encourage food industry innovation?

The classification system recognizes that in some product categories there are options that are healthier than others. For example, breakfast cereals that are low in saturated fat and sodium and high in fibre are classified as **everyday** cereals. Breakfast cereals that are relatively high in saturated fat and sodium and low in fibre are classified as **occasional**, and those in the middle as **sometimes** cereals. This division encourages the food industry to reformulate and innovate their products so they can be classified as **everyday** or **sometimes**. The nutrient criteria were partly based on the nutritional profile of products that are currently on the market. If new products come onto the market with improved nutrient profiles, then these could well set the new standard when the nutrient criteria are reviewed in the future.

## Will the Ministry consider implementing this system in other settings or just schools and ECE services?

The classification system was designed specifically for schools and ECE settings. Foods and beverages commonly consumed by children in these settings have been classified. If it is to be applied to a different setting it may need to be adapted. Currently the Ministry of Health and the New Zealand Television Broadcasting Council are looking at whether the classification system could be used to help reduce television advertising of unhealthy food to children.



## What about shops near schools that sell unhealthy options? Will kids just buy occasional foods and drinks on the way to and from school or from the local shops at lunchtime?

Children that have permission to leave the school grounds at lunchtime may choose to go and buy **occasional** foods elsewhere. However, students are likely to consume fewer **occasional** foods and drinks overall if they are not readily available at school. Changes made in the school can have a 'ripple' effect outside the school and in the wider community. With a school's community-wide approach to changes in the food provided, students will become more aware that foods and drinks high in fat and/or salt and/or added sugar and served in large package sizes are not suitable for everyday consumption.

One of the critical factors to ensure that the classification system is successful is the involvement of students themselves. Schools and their communities will also be encouraged to work with local food providers and/ or local government to improve food and beverage options available in the school vicinity. This is encouraged through another Mission-On initiative 'Student Health Promotion', and through the Health Promoting Schools initiative.

## Are all schools and ECE services affected by this?

Recent changes to the National Administration Guidelines will mean that in all state and state-integrated schools where food and beverages are sold on school premises, only healthy options will be made available from 1 June 2008. Schools will also be required to promote healthy food and nutrition for all students.

Licensed ECE services are required to meet the nutritional needs of children who attend the service. Early childhood education service regulatory requirements are currently under review. It is proposed that this nutrition-related requirement continue, with the additional obligation for early childhood education services to encourage healthy eating guidelines when parents provide food for children to eat while at the service.

The Food and Beverage Classification System will be a useful tool to help schools and ECE services meet regulatory obligations.

## **Why not give students information about healthier foods and drinks and let them make their own choices?**

Students still have many choices – between **everyday** and **sometimes** foods and drinks! Students can be encouraged to choose healthy options by making healthy choices the easy choices. Nutrition education in the classroom should be supported by consistent messages about the importance of healthy food and nutrition, for example, what is sold or provided in the school environment.

## **What else is happening in the area of improving nutrition?**

Lots of things! The Healthy Eating-Healthy Action Strategy and Implementation Plan identified a framework of outcomes and actions to improve nutrition, increase physical activity and reduce obesity. The Mission-On campaign of 10 initiatives is also underway. This package of initiatives targets the 0–24 years age group. Some of the programmes that are happening currently are:

- innovation funding for PHO (primary health organisations) community action
- working with industry to decrease exposure of children to advertising
- Mission-On Lifestyle Ambassadors
- Mission-On Student Health Promotion
- work to improve breastfeeding rates in New Zealand
- workforce development
- Feeding our Futures social marketing campaign.