
Message for the School Principal

Please find enclosed a Healthier Schools Toolkit for school-aged children. The purpose of this toolkit is to promote healthy lifestyles among students today and to reduce their risk of developing noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) later in life.

NCDs are a set of diseases, primarily cardiovascular (heart) diseases, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes, which together kill some 36 million people worldwide each year. These deaths are largely preventable and caused by the presence of four modifiable risk factors – tobacco use, unhealthy diet, insufficient physical inactivity and the harmful use of alcohol.

Today we live in a world where processed foods that are very high in salt, sugar, saturated fats and trans-fats have become the staple food in nearly every corner of the world. These junk foods are readily available, aggressively marketed and advertised, and especially targeted at young, impressionable children. The prevalence of these fast food diets combined with a lack of physical exercise have resulted in childhood obesity and overweight, which is increasing at a much faster rate than that in adults. It is estimated that globally more than 40 million preschool children are obese or overweight. By being obese or overweight, a child will be at greater risk for developing NCDs such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes. In fact, not so long ago, type 2 diabetes was seen only in adults but is now increasingly occurring in obese and overweight children.

The World Health Organization (WHO) believes that this problem needs to be tackled now, and not when the illnesses have taken hold. Alongside parents, schools play a crucial role in influencing the adoption of healthy behaviours among students, thereby making a positive and lasting impact on the health and well-being of the students, their families and the wider community.

This toolkit aims to create awareness among teachers and students about the various risk factors that can lead to chronic NCDs later in life. These are simple, short-term lifestyle changes that cost nothing but will benefit the students in the long term. Armed with this knowledge, your students could use their “pester power” to help educate their families and encourage/pester them to adopt healthier lifestyles too.

In this toolkit, you will find five posters that convey messages for adopting healthy lifestyles as well as a teacher’s guide book that provides additional information for teachers. The posters can be displayed at various school events, including school exhibitions, international health days, health talks, etc.

We hope you will find this toolkit useful and that, working in partnership with you and your staff, we can encourage the students to make healthier choices today so that they live longer and more productive lives tomorrow.