

news release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:

Laurie Lennon
704-526-5749
llennon@burnesscommunications.com

California High School Students Consuming Fewer Calories at School

Study examined students' dietary intake; found differences between California students and students in states that had no nutrition standards for school snack foods

Chicago, May 7, 2012—California high school students consumed fewer calories, less sugar and less fat at school than students in states that allowed schools to sell unhealthy snacks and drinks outside of meals, according to a study published today in the *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*. Analyses of students' dietary intake—both in and outside of school—showed that students in California consumed a total of 158 fewer calories per day, on average, with the difference coming largely from decreased consumption while at school.

The study found no evidence that California students consumed more calories outside of school to compensate for consuming fewer calories at school. The authors also repeated the analysis with only Hispanic students, a population with particularly high rates of obesity, and found similar results.

“Our findings suggest that strong nutrition standards for snacks and drinks may be an effective strategy for reducing weight gain among teens,” said lead author Daniel Taber, PhD, MPH. Taber is an investigator with [Bridging the Gap](#), a research program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which funded the study. “It’s especially encouraging to see reduced consumption of calories, sugar and fat among Hispanic students, given the disparities in obesity rates within that population.”

California was one of the first states to set strong nutrition standards for competitive foods—those foods and beverages sold through vending machines, à la carte cafeteria lines, school stores and other sources outside of school meals. Starting in July 2007, the state limited the calorie, fat, saturated fat and sugar content of snacks sold in schools. In July 2009, it banned the sale of soda and other sweetened beverages in high schools.

Other research documents California’s success in improving the nutritional content of school snacks and drinks since the laws went into effect. This study is the first to compare dietary intake among California high school students with intake among students in other states that did not have nutrition standards for competitive foods.

Although the study found that California students’ intake of calories, sugar and fat was lower at school, it also showed that students took in fewer vitamins and minerals at school. Overall, the nutritional composition of students’ in-school diets was similar across all states in the study.

According to Taber, this was not surprising because California restricted sales of less healthy foods, but did not require schools to offer healthy options, like fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Other studies show that many California schools offered foods like baked chips, which meet the state's nutrition standards, but offer little nutritional value.

“If we want to promote a healthy diet in schools, we need regulations that require nutritious foods and drinks,” said Taber. “We can’t just ban the most unhealthy ones. The laws in California are a good start, but this study shows that we need to do more to ensure that kids have healthy snacks and drinks throughout the school day.”

Currently, there is a window of opportunity to strengthen federal standards for competitive foods in schools, which have not been updated in more than 30 years. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 authorized the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to set nutrition standards that are aligned with the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for all foods and drinks available outside of school meals. USDA is expected to release its proposed rule in the coming months.

“This study shows that removing junk foods from our schools may help prevent weight gain among teens,” said C. Tracy Orleans, PhD, senior scientist at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. “It also contributes to the growing body of evidence that makes the case for the USDA to set strong standards for snack foods in schools. Stronger federal regulations will help ensure that all students have healthy choices at school and provide guidance that states need to enhance their current snack food and beverage standards.”

The study, “Differences in nutrient intake associated with state laws regarding fat, sugar, and caloric content of competitive foods,” analyzed nutrient intake among 680 high school students from February to May 2010 using 24-hour recall data to calculate overall daily intake at school, home and other locations, such as restaurants.

#

About Bridging the Gap

Bridging the Gap is a nationally recognized research program dedicated to improving the understanding of how policies and environmental factors influence diet, physical activity and obesity among youth, as well as youth tobacco use. For more information, visit www.bridgingthegapresearch.org.

About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation focuses on the pressing health and health care issues facing our country. As the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans, the Foundation works with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, meaningful and timely change. For nearly 40 years the Foundation has brought experience, commitment and a rigorous, balanced approach to the problems that affect the health and health care of those it serves. When it comes to helping Americans lead healthier lives and get the care they need, the Foundation expects to make a difference in your lifetime. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org.