

Chronic Diseases

Healthy Lifestyles and Schools September 2009

Caribbean Heads of Government in response to the heavy burden of non-communicable diseases on the citizens of the region issued the Port of Spain Declaration in September 2007 “Uniting to Stop the Epidemic of Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases” and declared that the second Saturday in September should be celebrated as Caribbean Wellness Day. We invite you to join in this initiative.

Healthy behaviors are established early in life. Most smokers start their habit before age 18. Overweight, dietary preferences, and patterns of physical activity typically begin in childhood. As the place where children and adolescents spend most of their time, schools can play a formative role in encouraging healthy living in the short and long terms.

One of the most effective things schools can do is make the healthy choice the easy choice for children and teens. Teachers and administrators can help by setting a good example.

What schools can do:

- Increase food choices—starting in September—by adding water, juice, soy milk, whole-grain breads, fruits, and vegetables. “Banning” unhealthy foods can backfire by making them even more desirable.
- Get children involved in choosing which healthy foods they want.
- Plant container gardens for fruits and vegetables, and let children help tend them.
- Sponsor competitions, for example, to see which class can do the most physical activity.
- Hold half-hour aerobic sessions.
- Hold debate competitions on healthy lifestyle topics.
- Hold song/jingle completions focused on healthy lifestyle themes.
- Ask private sector companies (but NOT tobacco, alcohol, or junk food producers) to donate hula hoops, skipping ropes, balls, sports gear, shoes, etc., featuring their logos with the logo of Caribbean Wellness Day.
- Have home economics departments do demonstrations and tastings of easy-to-prepare, healthy snacks and breakfast options that children can make for themselves.
- Establish comprehensive school health programs that promote physical activity, healthy foods, a smoke-free campus, outreach to families and the community, and healthy living by school staff.

Selected Indicators among Caribbean students 13 - 15 year old from the from Global School Health Survey (2004 - 2008)

