NATIONAL NUTRITION WEEK 2009: HEALTHY EATING FOR CHILDREN FINAL

July 2009

INTRODUCTION

This serves as a background document highlighting the key messages to be used throughout National Nutrition Week 2009 and can be used in conjunction with the Questions and Answers document.

The objective of this document is to outline the three key messages to be communicated and the statistics to be used in order to ensure consistency in what is communicated by all involved with National Nutrition Week 2009.

The actual communication of the message contents can be adapted according to the target market they are being communicated to e.g. media, lower income consumers, higher income consumers, adults, children, but the overall content and meaning should remain consistent with this document and the associated Questions and Answers document.

INDUSTRY GUIDELINES FOR USE OF NATIONAL NUTRITION WEEK 2009 KEY MESSAGES

OVERALL MESSAGE (Healthy eating for children) AND 3 ASSOCIATED KEY MESSAGES (Enjoy a variety of foods, Drink lots of clean, safe water, Be active):

- The theme of National Nutrition Week 2009, 'Healthy Eating for Children' forms part of the larger Department of Health's, Healthy Lifestyle Campaign that focuses on:
  1) promoting good nutrition
  2) regular physical activity
  3) safe sexual behaviour
  4) tobacco control and
  5) interventions against alcohol and substance abuse.

- The target group for the National Nutrition Week 2009 ‘Healthy Eating for Children’ campaign is children from grades 3 to grade 6 and their parents/guardians, educators and caregivers.

- The three key messages pertaining to the overall message of ‘Healthy eating for children’, will be:
  1. Enjoy a variety of foods (with emphasis on eating plenty of vegetables and fruit every day)
  2. Drink lots of clean, safe water
  3. Be active.

- The overall messages must remain consistent as per this document and associated Questions and Answers document, in order to ensure consistency, but can be adapted depending on the target audience being communicated to e.g. educators, learners, parents, media.

- The overall message and associated 3 key messages should be used in the exact format and using the exact wording to avoid too many messages and confusion.

- The statistics given should be the exact statistics used in this document in order to avoid confusion or too many messages.

- The messages should only be used for generic health promotion and not to promote any specific brands.

- The messages should not be expanded beyond the overall message 'Healthy eating for children' and the 3 associated messages, Enjoy a variety of foods; Drink lots of clean, safe water; Be active.

- Any of these messages that are linked to NNW in any way should be sent to the Department of Health: Directorate Nutrition for approval.

NATIONAL NUTRITION WEEK 2009: KEY MESSAGES

Overall message: HEALTHY EATING FOR CHILDREN

The Department of Health has a broad Healthy Lifestyle Campaign that focuses on:

1. promoting good nutrition
2. regular physical activity
3. safe sexual behaviour
4. tobacco control
5. interventions against alcohol and substance abuse.

National Nutrition Week (NNW) fits within this broader Department of Health campaign. The specific theme, 'Healthy eating for children' and within this a focus on 3 key messages; Enjoy a variety of foods (with emphasis on vegetables and fruit); Drink lots of clean, safe water and Be active, has been chosen for the 2009 NNW, as although South Africa faces many nutritional challenges across all ages, children are the foundation of the nation and so addressing their nutritional concerns as a priority is investing in our future.

The reality is that more than half of SA children under the age of 9 years are deficient in Vitamin A and more than one out of ten are iron deficient. These deficiencies impact on the growth, development and performance at school of the children themselves but also the country as a whole.

Stunting and underweight are the most common nutritional disorders amongst South African children affecting almost one out of five (stunting) and almost one out of ten children (underweight) respectively. Yet at the same time overweight and obesity are also a concern amongst our children. One child out of 10 (10%) under the age of 9 years is overweight and 4% are obese.

These statistics indicate the importance of educating children on good nutrition and encouraging children to 'enjoy a variety of foods'.

Water is also vital to our wellbeing hence the recommendation to 'drink lots of clean, safe water'. In South Africa our tap water is generally safe to drink and the South African national standard compares well with the World Health Organisations (WHO) limits.

Good nutrition has to go hand in hand with being active. The SA Youth Risk Behaviour Survey of 2002 found that 37,5% of our youth do not participate in physical activity and 25% watch television/are playing computer games for 3 hours or more per day. It is therefore vital to promote the 'be active' message amongst children.

There is an urgent need to address these challenges and improve the nutritional status and health status of all South African children.

KEY MESSAGE 1: ENJOY A VARIETY OF FOODS

Key to a child's optimal wellbeing is that they learn to and are encouraged to ENJOY A VARIETY OF FOODS.

Living things need food for energy, to move, grow and to repair damage to their bodies and humans have digestive systems for getting nutrients from food. We need a balanced diet from certain foods groups to be healthy and so need to enjoy a variety of foods. There is no one perfect food and all foods can fit into a healthy eating plan. The more different types of foods you eat, the healthier you are.

All foods fit into 5 types:

1. Starchy foods
2. Vegetables and fruit
3. Chicken, fish, milk, meat, eggs
4. Dried beans, peas, lentils and soy
5. Fats, oils and sugars

The best way to ensure that a child obtains all the nutrients needed for growth and development is to eat regular meals (morning, afternoon and evening) and include a variety of foods in their eating plan.

We do however know that an important guideline for healthy eating for children is to 'Eat plenty of vegetables and fruit every day' and so children should be encouraged to eat at least 5 servings of a variety of different vegetables and fruit every day. Vegetables and fruit are the body's best source of a wide range of vitamins and minerals and substances that promote health.

As children are at school for much of the day and have a high energy requirement for their rapid growth, snacks are an important part of their diet. For these reasons, lunch boxes and snacks should contain a variety of healthy foods.

LINK TO KEY MESSAGE 2:

Just as healthy food choices are important for children, so too are their beverage choices. Considering the variety of available beverages, a basic guideline is often neglected.

KEY MESSAGE 2: DRINK LOTS OF CLEAN, SAFE WATER.

Water is vital for optimal wellbeing. Clean, safe water is the cheapest drink there is and is the best choice of beverage for children, so they should aim to have between 6 to 8 glasses of clean, safe water a day. The overall fluid requirement for children is at least 2l per day and this comes from the water we drink and the foods and beverages that we choose.

In South Africa our tap water is generally safe to drink and the South African national standard compares well with the World Health Organisations (WHO) limits. According to the Blue Drop Report 2009 from the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry there was 93% compliance, with the microbiological limits of the national standard. It is acknowledged that there are areas around the country where the water may at times not meet the required technical standard, hence the need to ensure that the water one drinks is clean and safe.

Clean and safe are critically important. It means that the water you drink must come from a trustworthy source. If you are concerned about the safety of your water supply then you should either boil the water and then cool it in a clean container or you should use the bleach method where you add one teaspoon of bleach to 20 litres of water and let it stand for a minimum of 2 hours.

3 tips for getting children to drink water are:

1. Give them a bottle of cool clean, safe water to take to school every day;
2. Serve a glass of water with each meal;
3. Give children a glass of clean, safe water to drink when they brush their teeth in the morning and evening.

LINK TO KEY MESSAGE 3:

A child's wellbeing is dependent on more than just the variety of food that they eat or the clean, safe water they drink. Exercise is critical and so key to NNW is also the message to be active.

KEY MESSAGE 3: BE ACTIVE.

The SA Youth Risk Behaviour Survey of 2002 found that 37,5% of our youth do not participate in physical activity and that 25% watch television/are playing computer games for 3 hours or more per day. This is a sad reality and gives some insight as to why we have to be concerned about overweight and obesity amongst our children.

Exercise makes the body strong and allows you to stay healthier for longer. The guideline is that children need to be active for at least 30 minutes on most days or at least be physically active 3 times a day for approximately 10 minutes at a time. Physical activity includes all forms of activity such as walking, playing ball, dancing, cycling and playing outdoors.

COMMUNICATION SUMMARY:

Healthy eating and healthy living is critical for everyone and especially our children who are our future.

NNW 2009 aims to encourage healthy eating amongst our children through ensuring that they:

- Receive and learn to enjoy a variety of foods
- Drink lots of clean, safe water
- Be active and get some physical activity every day

Optimal health (physical and mental) for children means we have to take how we feed our children seriously and we need to teach children what healthy eating is so that they too can take control of their health from the earliest age.

Guidelines for Healthy Eating for South Africans:
It is recognised that healthy eating has a number of important components. The South African Food-Based Dietary Guidelines give 10 practical pointers relevant to healthy eating for children:

1. Enjoy a variety of foods
2. Be active
3. Drink lots of clean, safe water
4. Eat plenty of vegetables and fruit every day
5. Make starchy foods the basis of most meals
6. Eat dry beans, split peas, lentils and soy regularly
7. Chicken, fish, meat, milk or eggs can be eaten daily
8. Eat fats sparingly
9. Use salt sparingly
10. Use food and drinks containing sugar sparingly and not between meals

FURTHER READING

- Healthy Lifestyle Campaign: Department of Health
- South African Guidelines for Healthy Eating: Department of Health.
- Executive summary of the National Food Consumption Survey Fortification Baseline (NFCS-FB-I) South Africa 2005.
- The Blue Drop Report 2009 Version 1. South African Water Quality Management Performance: Department of Water Affairs and Forestry.
- First South African National Youth Risk Behaviour Survey 2002 (YRBS): Department of Health.
- Global Strategy of Diet, Physical Acticity and Health: World Health Organisation.
- South African Comparative Risk Assessment - 17 Risk Factors: Medical Research Council (MRC)

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