Eat smart campaign to help young students
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A territory-wide healthy eating campaign for primary school students will be launched in the coming school year to help children to prevent long term health problems such as obesity, heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

Entitled “EatSmart@school.hk” the campaign will be launched in the 2006/07 school year by the Department of Health in collaboration with partners from various sectors.

To pave the way for the campaign, a series of publicity activities will be conducted, starting this month.

It will include the introduction and promotion of the “Nutritional Guidelines on School Lunch for primary school students” to guide caterers to provide balanced diets to the 300 000 students in some 600 whole-day primary schools.

Speaking at a press conference today (April 3) to announce the campaign and its related activities, the Assistant Director of Health, Dr Regina Ching said the campaign was timely in view of the rising trend of obesity among primary school students in recent years.

“Obesity posed a growing threat to the health of children in Hong Kong as almost one in five primary school kids is overweight.

“The prevalence of obesity among local primary school students increased from 16.4 per cent in 1997/98 to 18.7 per cent in 2004/05,” Dr Ching said.

The campaign aims to facilitate the provision of healthy lunches and food items at schools and to cultivate healthy eating practices among children.

“The success of the campaign would enable students to develop in a healthy way and learn effectively,” Dr Ching said.

Dr Ching said the nutrition guidelines had been disseminated to all targeted users including principals of primary schools and food traders involved in the lunch catering service for primary schools.
She said the main points in the guidelines include:

- Provide grains, vegetables and meat in the ration of 3:2:1;
- Contain fresh vegetables and fruits;
- Use lean meat, fish or skinned poultry;
- Use low fat cooking methods such as steaming, boiling or baking;
- Avoid high fat and high salt gravy/sauce;
- Avoid processed meat and preserved food.

“We hope that it could serve as a reference for school managements to define food requirements and become a standard feature in business contracts signed between the school and the caterers in the coming school year.

“Equally important for the guidelines to work is parents’ understanding and support for a healthier menu for their children,” Dr Ching said.

A series of briefings on the guidelines will also be conducted for the stakeholders including food caterers and school managements in the coming few months.

Other promotional works in the campaign will include the production of an interactive educational website and tailor-made teaching kits for students and teachers of primary schools.

Also speaking in the press conference are the President-elect of the Hong Kong Nutrition Association, Mr Spencer Tong, Chief Curriculum Development Officer of Education and Manpower Bureau, Mr Stephen Yip and the Vice-chairperson of Committee on Home-School Co-operation (CHSC), Mr Christopher Yu.

Mr Tong said the guidelines are in line with the recommendations of the World Health Organization.

Mr Tong pointed out that should the guidelines be followed closely, the threat of obesity and associated lifestyle diseases among students would be greatly reduced.

Noting that a healthy school lunch would provide one third of the daily nutritional needs of children, Mr Tong
said a balanced diet was vital for children’s normal growth and development.

“We hope that local food traders will take note of the guidelines and provide healthy meals to our children,” he added.

“We fully support the strengthening of nutritional education for primary school students and call on all primary schools to adopt and implement the guidelines,” Mr Yip said.

Mr Yu said parents’ knowledge and support of healthy eating was vital in shaping children’s good dietary practices and the CHSC would encourage parents and parent-teacher associations of primary schools to be actively involved in the promotion of healthy-eating in schools.

Details of the guidelines are available at the DH’s Central Health Education Unit website (http://www.cheu.gov.hk). Members of the public are also encouraged to give their views on healthy eating for school students to DH through e-mail (health@cheu.gov.hk).

Government departments and other organizations participated in the campaign include:

- Centre for Health Education and Health Promotion, Faculty of Medicine, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
- Committee on Home-School Co-operation
- Education and Manpower Bureau
- Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
- Hong Kong Nutrition Association
- Hong Kong Association for the Study of Obesity
- Radio Television Hong Kong
- The Subsidized Primary Schools Council
- Union of Government Primary School Headmasters and Headmistresses
- Union of Heads of Aided Primary Schools of Hong Kong.

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