

Title

Titbits Decree – decree on unhealthy food in schools

Short description

The “titbits decree” (Decree on unhealthy food in schools) is a public policy measure adopted by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in collaboration with Ministry of Health. It aims to promote healthy nutrition in schools in order to mitigate the growing problem of childhood obesity. The decree was enacted in September 2016 as an implementation of 2015 amendment to the Education Act. The goal of the decree is to reduce consumption of unhealthy food and stimulate availability of healthy alternatives in schools. No food can be advertised, offered for sale and sold in schools containing sweeteners (except for chewing gum), caffeine, trans-fatty acids from partially hardened fats, or energetic or stimulating beverages and food for athletes or those performing increased physical activity. The early response by schools and many parents was relatively negative, as they claimed the decree reduced assortment of food and beverages in school buffets and cafeterias, as well as increasing the price of food. However, medical and nutrition experts hailed the decree adoption for the benefits healthy eating brought to the students

Topic

Consuming – food

Characteristics (type, level)

National intervention

Country/Countries of implementation

Czech Republic

Aims and Objectives

The aim of the decree is to reduce consumption of unhealthy food and stimulate availability of healthy alternatives in schools. The objective is to change the trend of increasing obesity in schoolchildren.

Target Group

School children (approx. 6-15 years)

Status

Ongoing

Start and Completion dates

autumn 2016 - today

Lifestyle and Behavior Change

The decree bans availability and advertising of unhealthy food and beverages in schools and (rather implicitly) promotes their healthier alternatives. By reducing availability of unhealthy food to children (even though only on school days), it strives to change unhealthy diets that increasingly lead to obesity in children.

Effects on:

Health and Wellbeing	The practice aims at improving often unhealthy food consumption patterns in school children that contributes to currently increasing trend in child obesity by reducing availability of unhealthy food.
Vulnerable populations	The practice may have positive effect on children with lower socio-economic status, because they often take over their unhealthy food consumption habits from their families. On the other hand, there are some indications of price increases of the new assortment of food in school buffets as healthier food is more costly, what may restrict its affordability to children with lower socio-economic status.
Environment	Environmental effects are not explicitly addressed in the decree itself, but the ban may indirectly reduce demand for processed food that is generally more carbon intensive in production phase.

Initiated and/or implemented by

The decree was initiated and implemented by Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in collaboration with Ministry of Health.

Stakeholders and sectors involved

- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports – responsible for implementation of the decree
- Ministry of Health in collaboration with nutritional experts – defined requirements on food in terms of maximum limits of fats, sugar and salt
- school canteens – obliged to change products on sale for healthier alternatives compliant with decree requirements

Financial support

No financial support was provided to school buffets.

Evidence-base

According to the draft bill submitted to the Parliament this practice is a result of “*public demand for a measure against improper eating habits of children and against wide availability of food and beverages whose consumption is not consistent with principles of*

healthy nutrition in schools". A backgrounder to the draft of decree extensively defines the problem addressed, starting from obesity in children, to assortment on sale in beverage machines and buffets in schools, and to findings from survey on catering options among school children conducted in 2011. A considerable discrepancy found between actual situation in schools and official guidelines on school catering is taken as sufficient basis for an intervention in a form of proposed 'titbits' decree.

Main activities

According to the decree all school buffets/cafeterias may only advertise, offer for sale and sale food and beverages containing no more than prescribed limit values of sugar, fats and salt and

- containing no added sweeteners or caffeine,
- containing no trans-fatty acids from partially hardened fats, or
- that are not energetic or stimulating beverages and food for athletes or those performing increased physical activity.

Evaluation

None (at least for the time being)

Main results

The decree came into force in January 2017, therefore the full scale effect is yet to be seen. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some school buffets were closed, others reduced assortment of food on sale and many have started to seek for healthier alternatives.

Key success factors and barriers

The key success is that the decree was adopted, because it withstood a vocal opposition. Some opponents consider the requirements (i.e. maximum limits on salt, sugar and fats) too strict, and others claim that families not schools should care about children's nutrition habits.

INHERIT Perspective

This initiative has a potential to improve children's health by changing their eating patterns, hence influencing EXPOSURE/EXPERIENCE and changing BEHAVIOUR. The intervention can be easily transferred and implemented in other European countries, with no significant costs and large coverage

More information

- Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports – press release and decree (in Czech only) – <http://www.msmt.cz/ministerstvo/novinar/pamlskova-zacne-platit-20-zari-2016>
- Draft of the decree with backgrounder (in Czech only) <https://apps.odok.cz/veklep-detail?pid=RACKA4FF3RJ3>
- text of the decree (in Czech only) - <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2016-282>

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