



Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Health**

# **WA Healthy Food and Drink School Principal Survey Report 2020**

Prepared by the Chronic Disease Prevention Directorate  
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Western Australian Department of Health

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## Executive Summary

The Department of Health funds the Western Australian School Canteen Association (Inc.) (WASCA) to provide support to schools to implement the Department of Education's Healthy Food and Drink in Public Schools Policy (the 'Policy'), through the Healthy Food and Drink Project.

Principals of all public schools, including Independent Public Schools, are required to implement the Healthy Food and Drink (HFD) Policy, which applies to all school settings including canteens/food services, classroom rewards, and classroom cooking activities, school camps and excursions.

The main objective for incorporating the WA HFD School Principal Survey in Principals' reporting is to evaluate implementation of the HFD Policy and provide critical information about the return on investment of the HFD Project, as well as guide the WASCA's activities and services provided to schools.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the 2020 school year through restrictions in canteen/food service operations and school closures. The WASCA adapted swiftly to the changing environment by providing additional support to schools/school canteens operations along with frequent up-to-date advice and recommendations on adopting COVID-19 safe food service plans. Recommendations were based on advice from the WA Department of Health and Department of Education in consultation with the WA Council of State Schools Organisation (WACSSO). Despite disruptions, the current survey response rate was 15 per cent higher than previous years.

### Key findings

A total of 576 schools completed the 2020 WA HFD School Principal Survey out of 800 schools invited to complete the survey (72 per cent response rate).

#### *Schools with a whole of school healthy eating policy*

- The majority of schools (64.9 per cent) reported having a policy for the provision of healthy food and drinks, 19.8 per cent were developing a policy, and 13.9 per cent of schools did not have a policy.
- Schools with a canteen/food service (60.9 per cent) were significantly more likely to have a policy for the provision of healthy food and drinks in place

compared to schools with no food service (70.7 per cent compared to 56 per cent, respectively).

- The majority of metropolitan (70.2 per cent) and regional schools (56.2 per cent) that responded had a policy in place.

#### *Provision of food and drink*

- 58.1 per cent of schools with canteens/food services met all policy requirements related to the menu.
- Almost all schools reported their canteen/food service menu consisted of a minimum of 60 per cent green food and drinks (95.7 per cent) and a maximum of 40 per cent amber food and drinks (92.9 per cent).
- Compliance was slightly lower for offering savoury commercial amber products no more than two days per week (82.9 per cent of all schools with a canteen/food service).
- High schools with a canteen/food service were more likely (24.4 per cent) to offer a menu that contained red food and drinks, even on an occasional basis, than primary schools (16.1 per cent) and other schools (16.7%), however these differences were not statistically significant.
- With the exception of not offering red food or drink, high schools with a canteen/food service were more likely to meet all other HFD Policy traffic light criteria (19.2 per cent), than primary schools (12.9 per cent) and other schools (11.1 per cent) however, these differences were not statistically significant.
- There were no statistically significant differences in reported compliance between metropolitan and regional schools, for canteen/food service menus:
  - consisting of a minimum of 60 per cent green food and drinks (96.0 per cent and 95.2 per cent respectively);
  - consisting of a maximum of 40 per cent amber food and drinks (94.3 per cent and 89.4 per cent respectively);
  - offering amber savoury commercial products, no more than two days per week (81.8 per cent and 85.6 per cent respectively);
  - offering red food or drinks even on an occasional basis (16.2 per cent and 22.1 per cent respectively).

### *Promoting healthy eating in schools*

- The most popular strategy used to promote healthy eating by all schools except secondary schools, was to 'run healthy eating programs such as *Crunch&Sip*<sup>®</sup> and school kitchen gardens (81.6 per cent of all schools).
- In secondary schools, the most popular strategy was to 'work with the school canteen to adopt the Health Promoting Schools Framework' (67.2 per cent of secondary schools and 100 per cent of K-12 schools).

### *Staff training*

- Completion of traffic light training was lower among canteen/food service employers (e.g. Parents and Citizen Associations (P&C) representative) compared to canteen/food service supervisors (84.6 per cent compared to 60.7 per cent).
- Significantly more canteen supervisors were traffic light trained in metropolitan schools (89.9 per cent) than in regional schools (72.1 per cent).
- Significantly more canteen employers in metropolitan schools (65.2 per cent) completed traffic light training compared with regional schools (50.0 per cent)
- FoodSafe training was completed by 90.6 per cent of canteen/food service supervisors, compared to 63.0 per cent of canteen/food service volunteers.
- A greater proportion of metropolitan schools (67.6 per cent) reported having completed FoodSafe training than regional schools (51.9 per cent); this difference was statistically significant ( $p$ -value 0.032).

## **Recommendations**

Overall, the 2020 WA HFD School Principal Survey results are encouraging especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on schools. In addition, the response rate to the survey increased from 2019 by 15 per cent. These are likely to be due at least in part, to the WASCA's successful adaptation of their service delivery to maintain school engagement.

The majority of schools (58.1 per cent) who completed the 2020 WA HFD School Principal Survey with a canteens/food service met all policy requirements related to

the menu. However, there remains room for all schools to increase their level of compliance with the Policy, in particular:

- increasing the number of schools with and without a canteen/food service to develop a whole of school healthy eating policy;
- ensuring red food and drink items are kept off the menu at all times;
- reducing the number of days per week amber savoury commercial products are offered across all schools;
- increasing the number of regional canteen/food service supervisors, employers and canteen service volunteers who complete traffic light and FoodSafe training;
- Increase the number of K-12 employees and canteen/food service volunteers who complete traffic light training and FoodSafe training.
- Increasing the number of whole of school activities schools conduct to promote healthy eating, in particular:
  - working with the school canteen/food service to adopt the Health Promoting Schools Framework;
  - working with the school canteen/food service to promote 'healthy eating days' across all schools; and
  - include nutrition advice or information in school newsletters at least once per term.

The 2020 survey results and the identified areas for improvement are consistent with the 2019 and 2018 surveys. Continued monitoring the implementation of HFD Policy and Project in schools is essential to assist in addressing the following recommendations for the Department of Education and Department of Health:

1. The Department of Education continues to administer the annual WA HFD School Principal Survey of public schools and invite the Department of Health to analyse the results.
2. The HFD Reference Group reviews and updates, as required, the WA HFD School Principal Survey questions to maintain relevance.
3. The Department of Education continues to implement strategies designed to increase the response rate for future WA HFD School Principal Surveys for example, by ensuring:
  - the survey is open for the appropriate amount of time;

- survey links are working correctly;
- respondents are aware of the number of responses required and how long the survey will take to complete;
- respondents are aware of the purpose and significance of the survey; and
- the most appropriate person is responding to the survey, e.g. school principals.
- there are follow-up internal Ed-e-mail reminders;

In addition, it is recommended that strategies are implemented to attract schools that have not completed the WA HFD School Principal Survey, in the past three years. This may include increased promotion to these schools to increase response rate.

4. Both the Department of Education and Department of Health support the WASCA to conduct independent objective evaluation of the HFD Project delivery and compliance, in line with best practice. This type of evaluation enables WASCA to develop further strategies to increase policy compliance.
5. The Department of Education, Department of Health, and the WASCA continue to make the WA HFD School Principal Survey results and summary results publicly available (e.g. on the Department of Education Policy webpage and the WASCA webpage) as done in previous years.
6. Continuation of quarterly HFD Reference Group meetings with the Department of Health, Department of Education, and the WASCA, to ensure all parties are kept informed and updated on the status of the HFD Policy and Project activities throughout the school year. In addition, the Reference Group continues to work with the WASCA to:
  - a) provide targeted support to schools to meet HFD Policy criteria, (particularly to remove red items from school canteen/food service menus and number of days per week amber savoury commercial products are offered), for example:
    - I. tailored training sessions for schools to ensure relevance of topics and networking opportunities;
    - II. WASCA to develop marketing messages and fact sheets specifically focussing on HFD Policy, for P&C Associations, teachers, principals and

health professionals on the benefits of healthy eating and awareness of the HFD Policy;

- III. increased focus on canteen staff identifying and removing red drinks from menus by: developing fact sheets; increase social media i.e. red alerts; greater focus on drinks in Traffic light training; and
- IV. WASCA to investigate qualitative data from all training sessions that will assist in Policy implementation;

b) provide targeted support to all schools to increase all training activities (particularly in regional schools); for example, the WASCA to increase engagement in regional WA schools to promote HFD Policy compliance and support, such as the traffic light training and FoodSafe training; including promoting training opportunities via newsletters and social media pages; increase online participation for all training.

c) increase education and awareness of the HFD Policy to P&C Associations in schools to increase engagement, implementation and compliance with the HFD Policy. Recommendation to:

- I. develop practical tools and resources on conducting healthy P&C activities in schools that align with the Policy, such as healthy fundraising events;
- II. deliver small group workshops specifically for P&C representatives; and
- III. increase collaboration with WACSSO to ensure alignment of activities;

d) provide targeted support to all schools, i.e. those with and without canteens, to increase the number of schools with a written Policy for the provision of healthy food and drinks; and

e) increased focus on partnerships with organisations to increase awareness of the HFD Policy such as: WA Primary Principals Association; WA Secondary Schools Executive Association; WA District High Schools Administrators Association; Refresh.ED.

## Background

Schools play a key role in introducing, supporting, and teaching children about healthy eating. Children spend a significant portion of their time in schools, and food and drinks consumed during school hours accounts for approximately one third (32 per cent) of a children's intake<sup>1</sup>. For some children, school canteens can account for a large proportion of their daily nutrition. In WA, it is estimated that 46 per cent of children order lunch from a school canteen or food outlet at least once per week<sup>2</sup>.

Food and drink available through school canteens can not only influence diet and nutrition related health outcomes such as growth but also impact children's energy levels, their ability to concentrate and academic performance<sup>3 4</sup>. Schools are important settings for interventions and school canteens can play a key role in shaping children's diets and provide practical, structured opportunities to influence nutrition knowledge, attitudes and behaviours in children, parents, and staff.

The World Health Organization (WHO) *Report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity*<sup>5</sup> highlights schools as important settings for creating a healthy school food environment. In June 2021, the WHO released implementation guidance on making every school a health-promoting school<sup>6</sup> including the importance for school canteens to provide healthy meals and not provide unhealthy snacks, foods and sugar-sweetened beverages for school aged children. In addition, the Council of Australian Government (COAG) Health Council *Good Practice Guide: Supporting healthy eating and drinking in schools* was developed in consultation with Australian, State, and Territory Government health and education agencies and has been endorsed by Health Ministers. This guide promotes healthy food and drink policies in

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Government Department of Health. 2007 National Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey. 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Pettigrew S, Donovan R, Jalleh G, Pescud M, Cowie S. Addressing childhood obesity through school canteens. Report to the WA Department of Education and Training. Perth: UWA Business School, the University of Western Australia, and the Centre for Behaviour Research in Cancer Control, Curtin University; 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Yoong SL, Nathan NK, Wyse RJ, Preece SJ, Williams CM, Sutherland RL, et al. Assessment of the School Nutrition Environment: A Study in Australian Primary School Canteens. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 2015;49(2):215-22.

<sup>4</sup> Lawlis T, Knox M, Jamieson M. School canteens: A systematic review of the policy, perceptions and use from an Australian perspective. *Nutrition & Dietetics*. 2016;73(4):389-98.

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization (2016). *Healthy Food and Drink Policy*, [Available from: <https://www.who.int/end-childhood-obesity/publications/taking-action-childhood-obesity-report/en/>

<sup>6</sup> World Health Organisation (2021). *Making every school a health-promoting school*, - Implementation guidance, [Available from: <https://www.who.int/activities/making-every-school-a-health-promoting-school> ]

schools, integration of nutrition into the school curriculum, and fostering partnerships<sup>7</sup> to support implementation of healthy food and drink policies.

The WA Department of Education's mandatory HFD Policy<sup>8</sup> applies to all WA public schools (including Independent Public Schools) and utilises a traffic light system to classify food and drinks (*Appendix 1*) based on nutrient criteria. The aim is to promote and encourage the choice of healthy (green) foods and drinks, limit amber food and drinks, and restrict the availability of the least healthy foods and drinks (red) in school canteens/food services:

- Green food and drinks are an excellent source of nutrients, contain less saturated fat and/or sugar and/or salt and help to avoid intake of excess energy (kJ) and must comprise of at least 60 per cent of the menu.
- Amber food and drinks have some nutritional value but also contain moderate levels of salt, sugar and/or saturated fat. Amber foods should be eaten in moderation and must comprise no more than 40 per cent of the menu. Savoury commercial amber products must not be offered on the menu more than twice a week.
- Red food and drinks lack adequate nutritional value, are high in saturated fat and/or added sugar and/or salt and contribute to excess energy and must not be offered on canteen and food service menus. Red categorised food and drinks will not be provided to students unless essential to learning programs.

The Department of Health funded Healthy Food and Drink (HFD) Project aims to assist schools in maintaining and strengthening policies and practices that support the provision and promotion of healthy food and drinks, particularly in school canteen/food services, in alignment with global, national and state policy objectives. The HFD Reference Group includes representatives from the Department of Health,

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<sup>7</sup> Health Council of Australian Governments. The Good Practice Guide: Supporting healthy eating and drinking at school, 2019. Available from: <https://www.coaghealthcouncil.gov.au/Portals/0/Reports/Good%20Practices%20to%20Support%20Healthy%20Eating%20and%20Drinking%20at%20School%20Updated%20Dec%202020.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Department of Education (2018). Healthy Food and Drink in Public Schools Policy, [Available from: <http://det.wa.edu.au/policies/detcms/policy-planning-and-accountability/policies-framework/policies/healthy-food-and-drink-policy.en?cat-id=3457102> ]

Department of Education and the WASCA to facilitate information sharing and address any pressing issues among the key stakeholders for this project.

As part of the Department of Education's reporting system, the Principal Survey relating to the canteen/food service and the HFD Policy has been conducted annually, since 2012. Following consultation with the HFD Reference Group and a formal request from the Department of Health, the WA HFD School Principal Survey questions were updated for the 2016 survey, and the same questions have been utilised for the last five years. Information from the survey is an integral component of the evaluation of the HFD Policy and Project, providing critical information about policy implementation, compliance and return on investment as well as guiding the WASCA's services.

## Methods

### Survey

Consistent with the previous WA HFD School Principal Surveys, an electronic communication was sent by the Department of Education to 800 WA public schools in September 2020. All principals have responsibility for the implementation of the HFD Policy in their school. The survey contained six questions relating to the HFD Policy and food service practices in the school:

1. *Does your school have a written policy for the provision of healthy food and drinks?*

- No, our school does not have a policy
- Our school is in the process of developing a policy
- Yes, our school has a policy
- Unsure

2. *What, if anything, does your school do to promote healthy eating? (check all that apply)*

- Include nutrition advice or information in the school newsletter at least once per term
- Conduct healthy P&C fundraising events (i.e. do not use 'red' items such as chocolates)
- Organise whole school events such as a health/nutrition campaign/event, theme day etc.
- Run healthy eating programs such as *Crunch&Sip*<sup>®</sup> or a school kitchen garden
- Invite qualified guest speakers to address students, parents and/or staff about healthy eating
- Work with the school canteen to adopt the Health Promoting Schools Framework
- Not a priority, do nothing specific
- Other, please specify

3. *Does your school operate a canteen/food service?*

- Yes
- No

4. *Does your school canteen/food service menu (answer choices Yes, No, or Unsure):*

- consist of a minimum of 60 per cent 'green' food and drinks?
- consist of a maximum of 40 per cent 'amber' food and drinks?
- offer savoury commercial amber products no more than two days per week?
- contain 'red' food and drinks, even on an occasional basis?

5. *Have the following people in your school community completed Traffic Light Training provided by the WA School Canteen Association Inc.? (answer choices: Yes, No, or Unsure)*

- Canteen/food service supervisor?
- Employer (e.g. P&C representative)?

6. *Have the following people participated in FoodSafe training (or its equivalent)? (answer choices Yes, No, Unsure)*

- Canteen/food service supervisor?
- Canteen/food service volunteers?

Responses to the above questions were de-identified by the Department of Education before providing the raw data to the Department of Health for analysis and reporting.

## **Data analysis**

Frequency tables were prepared in Microsoft Excel to describe the proportion of schools meeting each of the Policy requirements. Survey responses were compared in Excel and SPSS using a Chi Square test of independence to examine whether compliance with the HFD Policy varied by school location or type. To provide balanced groups of school types for Chi Square test comparisons, secondary (n=64) and district (n=37) high schools were combined as 'High Schools', and education support schools (n=47), specialist schools (n=1), and K-12 schools (n=3) were combined as 'Other Schools'. Responses of 'Unsure' were included in analyses of proportions but were excluded from all Chi-square statistical comparisons. Where contingency (frequency) tables contained values less than five, a Fishers exact probability value was calculated. Probability values less than 0.05 were accepted as being statistically significant. All data are presented as unweighted percentages.

## Results

### School type and location (Table 1)

- Completed surveys were returned by 576 schools (72 per cent response rate), of these, 241 schools (42 per cent) completed the survey in 2018 and 2019.
- A total of 359 (62.3 per cent) completed surveys were from metropolitan schools and 217 (37.7 per cent) from regional schools, similar to surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019.
- A greater proportion of primary schools both in regional and metropolitan locations completed the survey in 2020.
- Similar proportions of secondary, district high, education support, specialist and K-12 schools completed the survey as in the past three years.
- A greater number of regional primary schools responded to the 2020 survey (153) compared to 2018 and 2019 (115 and 137, respectively).

**Table 1: Location and types of schools, 2020 WA HFD School Principal Survey**

Schools (n=576)	Metro schools (n=359) n (%)	Regional schools (n=217) n (%)
Primary school (n=424)	271 (54.2%)	153 (30.6%)
Secondary school (n=64)	47 (73.4%)	17 (26.6%)
District high school (n=37)	2 (5.4%)	35 (94.6%)
Education support (n=47)	37 (78.7%)	10 (21.3%)
Specialist school (n=1)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)
K-12 schools (n=3)	1 (33.3%)	2 (66.7%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>359 (100%)</b>	<b>217 (100%)</b>

### **Written policy for the provision of healthy food and drinks (Table 2)**

- The majority of schools (64.9 per cent) reported having a policy for the provision of health food and drinks, 19.8 per cent were in the process of developing a policy, and 13.9 per cent of schools did not have a Policy.
- A total of 351 schools out of 576 reported having a canteen/food service (60.9 per cent of all schools) and these schools were more likely to have a policy than schools with no food service (70.7 per cent compared to 56.0 per cent respectively); this difference was statistically significant ( $p$ -value 0.0004).
- Metropolitan schools were more likely (70.2 per cent) to have a policy for the provision of healthy food and drinks in place than regional (56.2 per cent); this difference was statistically significant ( $p$ -value 0.0006).

**Table 2: Proportion of schools with a written policy for the provision of healthy food and drinks**

	Have a Policy	No Policy
<b>All schools (n=576)</b>	374 (64.9)	194 (33.7%)
Schools with a canteen/food service (n=351)	<b>248 (70.7%)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>99 (28.2%)<sup>a</sup></b>
Schools without a canteen/food service (n=221)	<b>126 (56.0%)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>95 (42.2%)<sup>a</sup></b>
<b>Location of school</b>		
Metropolitan (n=359)	<b>252 (70.2%)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>102 (28.4%)<sup>b</sup></b>
Regional (n=217)	<b>122 (56.2%)<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>92 (42.4%)<sup>b</sup></b>
<b>Type of school</b>		
Primary (n=424)	281 (66.3%)	138 (32.5%)
High schools* (n=101)	63 (62.4%)	36 (35.6%)
Secondary (n=64)	47 (73.4%)	17 (26.6%)
District high school (n=37)	16 (43.2%)	19 (51.4%)
Other** (n=51)	30 (58.8%)	20 (39.2%)
Education support (n=47)	28 (59.6%)	18 (38.3%)
Specialist school (n=1)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)
K-12 school (n=3)	1 (33.3%)	2 (66.7%)

'In the process of developing a 'Policy' was combined with 'No Policy' for statistical comparisons; 'Unsure' responses were excluded from statistical comparisons; <sup>a</sup> statistically significant according to a Chi Squared Test ( $p < 0.05$ ) comparing schools with a canteen/food service to schools without a canteen/food service, <sup>b</sup> statistically significant according to a Chi Squared Test ( $p < 0.05$ ) comparing schools that have a written policy metropolitan vs. regional. \*High schools include secondary and district high schools, combined for Chi Squared test; \*\*Other schools include schools identified as 'education support schools', 'specialists' schools' and 'K-12 schools', combined for Chi Squared test. There were no statistically significant differences according to a Chi Squared Test or Fishers Exact Test ( $p < 0.05$ ) comparing location of school or type of school.

## Schools that meet canteen/food service HFD Policy requirements (Table 3)

### *Provision of food and drink*

- Nearly all schools reported that their canteen/food service menu consisted of a minimum of 60 per cent green food and drinks (95.7 per cent) and a maximum of 40 per cent amber food and drinks (92.9 per cent), with no significant differences between primary schools, high schools and other schools.
- High schools with a canteen/food service were more likely (24.4 per cent) to offer a menu that contained red food and drinks, even on an occasional basis, than primary schools (16.1 per cent) and other schools (16.7%), however these differences were not statistically significant.
- There were no significant differences in reported compliance between metropolitan and regional schools, for the canteen/food service menu:
  - consisting of a minimum of 60 per cent green food and drinks (96.0 per cent and 95.2 per cent respectively);
  - consisting of a maximum of 40 per cent amber food and drinks (94.3 per cent and 89.4 per cent respectively);
  - offering amber savoury commercial products, no more than two days per week (81.8 per cent and 85.6 per cent respectively);
  - offering red food and drinks even on an occasional basis (16.2 per cent and 22.1 per cent respectively).

### *Staff training*

- There were high levels of completed traffic light training (84.6 per cent) and FoodSafe training (90.6 per cent) for canteen/food service supervisors. Completed training for canteen/food service volunteers was 60.7 per cent and 63.0 per cent, respectively.
- A greater proportion of metropolitan schools (89.9 per cent) reported having canteen/food service supervisors who had completed traffic light training compared to regional schools (72.1 per cent); this difference was statistically significant ( $p$ -value 0.0006).
- A greater proportion of metropolitan schools (65.2 per cent) reported having completed employer traffic light training when compared to regional schools (50.0 per cent); this difference was statistically significant ( $p$ -value 0.0409).

- A greater proportion of metropolitan school canteen/food service volunteers (67.6 per cent) reported having completed FoodSafe training than regional schools (51.9 per cent); this difference was statistically significant ( $p$ -value 0.0319).

#### *Overall compliance*

- Overall, 58.1 per cent of all schools with canteens/food services met all HFD Policy traffic light criteria requirements (canteen having at least 60 per cent green foods, no more than 40 per cent amber foods, no more than 2 days per week of savoury commercial amber foods and no red foods or drinks).
- High schools with a canteen/food service were more likely to meet all HFD Policy traffic light criteria except not offering red food or drink (19.2 per cent), than primary schools (12.9 per cent) and other schools (11.1 per cent) however, these differences were not statistically significant.
- There were no significant differences in reported compliance between metropolitan and regional school menus that met all traffic light criteria (59.9 per cent and 53.8 per cent, respectively). However, regional schools were more likely to meet all HFD Policy requirements except not offering red food or drink (17.3 per cent) than metropolitan schools (13.0 per cent), but these differences were not statistically significant.

**Table 3: Proportion of schools meeting canteen/food service HFD Policy requirements, in schools with a canteen/food service**

					Proportion of schools meeting traffic light criteria		Traffic light training completed		FoodSafe training Completed	
	Menu has minimum of 60% green food and drinks	Menu has maximum of 40% amber food and drinks	Offer savoury commercial amber products no more than two days per week	Menu contains red food and drinks even on an occasional basis	Menu meets all traffic light criteria <sup>^</sup>	Menu meets traffic light criteria except no red food and drinks <sup>^^</sup>	Canteen/ food service supervisor	Employer	Canteen/ food service supervisor	Canteen/ food service volunteers
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
<b>All schools with a canteen/food service</b>	336 (95.7%)	326 (92.9%)	291 (82.9%)	63 (17.9%)	204 (58.1%)	50 (14.2%)	297 (84.6%)	213 (60.7%)	318 (90.6%)	221 (63.0%)
<b>School location</b>										
Metropolitan schools with a canteen/food service	237 (96.0%)	233 (94.3%)	202 (81.8%)	40 (16.2%)	148 (59.9%)	32 (13.0%)	<b>222</b> <b>(89.9%)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>161</b> <b>(65.2%)<sup>b</sup></b>	229 (92.7%)	<b>167</b> <b>(67.6%)<sup>c</sup></b>
Regional schools with a canteen/food service	104 (95.2%)	93 (89.4%)	89 (85.6%)	23 (22.1%)	56 (53.8%)	18 (17.3%)	<b>75</b> <b>(72.1%)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>52</b> <b>(50.0%)<sup>b</sup></b>	89 (85.6%)	<b>54</b> <b>(51.9%)<sup>c</sup></b>
<b>Type of school</b>										
Primary schools with a canteen/food service	243 (95.3%)	235 (92.2%)	210 (82.4%)	41 (16.1%)	148 (58.0%)	33 (12.9%)	212 (83.1%)	157 (61.6%)	227 (89.0%)	149 (58.4%)
High schools * with a canteen/food service	76 (97.4%)	74 (94.9%)	68 (87.2%)	19 (24.4%)	45 (57.7%)	15 (19.2%)	70 (89.7%)	46 (59.0%)	76 (97.4%)	60 (76.9%)
Secondary schools with a canteen/ food service	59 (100%)	57 (96.6%)	49 (83.1%)	14 (23.7%)	31 (52.5%)	12 (20.3%)	56 (94.9%)	35 (59.3%)	58 (98.3%)	47 (79.7%)

	Proportion of schools meeting traffic light criteria				Traffic light training completed		FoodSafe training Completed			
	Menu has minimum of 60% green food and drinks	Menu has maximum of 40% amber food and drinks	Offer savoury commercial products no more than two days per week	Menu contains red food and drinks even on an occasional basis	Menu meets all traffic light criteria <sup>a</sup>	Menu meets traffic light criteria except no red food and drinks <sup>^^</sup>	Canteen/ food service supervisor	Employer	Canteen/ food service supervisor	Canteen/ food service volunteers
District high school schools with a canteen/food service	17 (89.5%)	17 (89.5%)	19 (100%)	5 (26.3%)	14 (73.7%)	3 (15.8%)	14 (73.7%)	11 (57.9%)	18 (94.7%)	13 (68.4%)
Other schools ** with a canteen/food service	17 (94.4%)	17 (94.4%)	13 (72.2%)	3 (16.7%)	11 (61.1%)	2 (11.1%)	15 (83.3%)	10 (55.6%)	15 (83.3%)	12 (66.7%)
Education support schools with a canteen/food service	14 (93.3%)	14 (93.3%)	12 (80.0%)	3 (20.0%)	10 (66.7%)	2 (13.3%)	12 (80.0%)	9 (60.0%)	12 (80.0%)	10 (66.7%)
K-12 school with a canteen/food service	3 (100%)	3 (100%)	1 (33.3%)	0 (0%)	1 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (100%)	1 (33.3%)	3 (100%)	2 (66.7%)

<sup>a</sup> Statistically significant according to a Chi Squared Test or Fishers Exact Test (p<0.05) comparing metropolitan schools to regional schools canteen food service supervisors trained in traffic light training; 'Unsure' responses were included in analysis of proportions, however excluded from statistical comparisons; <sup>b</sup> Statistically significant according to a Chi Squared Test or Fishers Exact Test (p<0.05) comparing metropolitan schools to regional schools employers trained in traffic light training; <sup>c</sup> Statistically significant according to a Chi Squared Test or Fishers Exact Test (p<0.05) comparing metropolitan schools to regional schools canteen/foodservice volunteers trained in FoodSafe training; 'Unsure' responses were included in analysis of proportions, however excluded from statistical comparisons; \*High schools includes secondary and district high schools, combined for Chi Squared test; \*\*Other schools includes schools identified as 'education support schools', 'specialists' schools' and 'K-12 schools', combined for Chi Squared test.

## Activities conducted by schools to promote healthy eating (Table 4)

- Most schools used multiple strategies to promote healthy eating. Less than 1 per cent of schools claimed that it was not a priority to promote healthy eating.
- The most popular strategy to promote healthy eating used by all schools except secondary schools was to 'run healthy eating programs such as *Crunch&Sip*<sup>®</sup> or a school kitchen garden (81.6 per cent of all schools). 100 per cent of K-12 schools and 67.2 per cent of secondary schools 'worked with the school canteen to adopt the Health Promoting Schools Framework' (in which health is integrated into the school curriculum as well as school policies, and which recognises the importance of links with health services and partnerships between the school, families and community). These results are consistent with both the 2018 and 2019 survey results.
- Similar proportions of metropolitan and regional schools 'ran healthy programs such as *Crunch&Sip*<sup>®</sup> or a school kitchen garden' (79.7 per cent and 84.8 per cent respectively), 'organised whole school events such as health/nutrition campaign/event, theme days' (37.9 per cent and 38.2 per cent respectively), or 'conducted healthy P&C fundraising events' (48.7 per cent and 37.3 per cent respectively), consistent with 2019 survey results.
- 'Inviting qualified guest speakers to address students, parents and/or staff about healthy eating' was the least used strategy (35.4 per cent of all schools), consistent with both the 2018 and 2019 survey results.
- 24 per cent of schools use 'other activities' on an ad-hoc basis to promote healthy eating in schools and incorporate them into the school curriculum.

**Table 4: Activities conducted by schools to promote healthy eating, 2020 WA HFD School Principal Survey**

Activity *	Total schools	Metropolitan	Regional	Primary school	Secondary school	District High school	Education Support school	K-12 schools	Specialist
	(%) n=576	(%) n=359	(%) n=217	(%) n=424	(%) n=64	(%) n=37	(%) n=47	(%) n=3	(%) n=1
Run healthy eating programs such as <i>Crunch and Sip</i> or a school kitchen garden	470 (81.6%)	286 (79.7%)	184 (84.8%)	385 (90.8%)	10 (15.6%)	32 (86.5%)	40 (85.1%)	3 (100%)	0 (0%)
Work with the school canteen to adopt the Health Promoting Schools Framework	282 (48.7%)	208 (57.9%)	74 (34.1%)	206 (48.6%)	43 (67.2%)	17 (45.9%)	13 (27.7%)	3 (100%)	0 (0%)
Include nutrition advice or information in the school newsletter at least once per term	252 (43.8%)	154 (42.9%)	98 (45.2%)	206 (48.6%)	11 (17.2%)	19 (51.4%)	14 (29.8%)	1 (33.3%)	1 (100%)
Organise whole school events such as a health/ nutrition campaign/ event, theme day etc.	219 (38.0%)	136 (37.9%)	83 (38.2%)	166 (39.3%)	26 (40.6%)	12 (32.4%)	14 (29.8%)	1 (33.3%)	0 (0%)
Conduct healthy P&C fundraising events	256 (44.4%)	175 (48.7%)	81(37.3%)	216 (50.9%)	9 (14.1%)	16 (43.2%)	13 (27.7%)	2 (66.7%)	0 (0%)
Invite qualified guest speakers to address students, parents and/or staff about healthy eating	204 (35.4%)	111 (30.9%)	93 (42.9%)	148 (34.9%)	21 (32.8%)	18 (48.6%)	15 (31.9%)	1 (33.3%)	1 (100%)
Not a priority, do nothing specific	5 (0.9%)	3 (0.8%)	2 (0.9%)	2 (0.5%)	2 (3.1%)	1 (2.7%)	0 (0%)	0(0%)	0 (0%)

\* Multiple responses permitted therefore percentages will not add up to 100

## Discussion

The HFD Policy aims to increase the capacity of WA public schools and key school stakeholders to establish, maintain and strengthen policies and practices that support the provision and promotion of healthy food and drinks in WA schools.

The 2020 WA HFD School Principal Survey results indicate that consistent with previous surveys, a majority of schools have a healthy food and drink policy or are in the process of developing a policy.

### School type

Schools with a canteen/food service and metropolitan schools were significantly more likely to have a written policy for the provision of healthy food and drink.

In 2019 the WASCA investigated common barriers and enablers with implementing and complying with the HFD Policy for secondary and regional schools through the Action on Nutrition (AoN) Project, a scholarship awarded through the Australian Health Promotion Association. The main barriers identified include: time taken for new foods to gain interest (thus managing potential wastage); lack of canteen volunteer support; concerns regarding profit/loss; parents'/students limited healthy food and drink knowledge; and competition with food outlets near schools, e.g. fast food outlets and supermarkets. Key enablers identified include: support/leadership from school principals, access to Star Choice™ products, the WASCA services, promoting the canteen via social media, and access to complementary programs, e.g. Crunch&Sip®<sup>9</sup>.

As a result, the WASCA are currently implementing several strategies based on these findings, these include:

- conducting individual school canteen menu assessments and providing follow-up phone support to discuss any further barriers schools are experiencing with adopting the HFD Policy in their school and identifying recommendations actioned from the initial menu assessment;
- development of marketing messages to increase students' knowledge of healthy eating and awareness of the HFD Policy. Proposed strategies include

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<sup>9</sup> Western Australian School Canteen Association Inc (2019). Annual Report 2018-19, [Available from: <https://www.waschoolcanteens.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/2019-WASCA-Annual-Report.pdf>]

incorporating key policy messages in lesson plans posters, newsletters and on social media platforms;

- continuing to provide tailored training sessions for high schools and regional schools to ensure the relevance of topics and networking opportunities;
- advocating for a duty of care approach, encouraging principals to restrict students leaving school grounds during school hours to purchase food from fast-food chains and convenience stores etc.

Secondary schools were less likely to run 'healthy eating programs such as *Crunch&Sip*<sup>®</sup> and school kitchen gardens, instead 'working with the school canteen to adopt the Health Promoting Schools Framework'. The reason for this may be due to the limited number of healthy eating programs that are tailored for secondary students, as well as difficulty implementing these programs in typically a larger school setting. These results are lower than reported in the previous two years.

In 2020, 58.1 per cent of schools met all the HFD Policy traffic light criteria, a slight increase from the previous year's findings. This demonstrates continuous improvement in schools with the support of WASCA.

### **School location**

The level of compliance in meeting the key components of the HFD Policy in schools with a canteen food service is high, with almost all metropolitan schools and regional schools reporting their canteen/food service menu consisted of a minimum of 60 per cent green food and drinks, and a maximum of 40 per cent amber food and drinks. In addition, schools offering red foods on the menu, even on an occasional basis, is showing a decreasing trend from previous years, from 25.4 per cent in 2018 to 17.9 per cent in 2020 across all schools with a canteen/food service.

While the level of completed traffic light training ranges from moderate to high, significantly more metropolitan schools reported having canteen/food service supervisors and employers who had completed traffic light training than regional schools. This is consistent with the previous three years survey results.

Overall, a greater proportion of metropolitan school canteen/food service volunteers completed FoodSafe training than regional schools in this reporting period. This may reflect the higher need for canteen/food service volunteers in metropolitan schools and the higher turnover of metropolitan volunteers; however, there is still room for

improvement for both metropolitan and regional schools to complete training. The differences seen in compliance by location may be a result from fewer face-to-face training sessions being conducted by the WASCA in regional areas due to limited resources and capacity as well as restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these challenges, the WASCA continues to develop several strategies to maintain training in regional schools via online e-learning modules and video conferences and one-on-one support provided via phone, email, the WASCA website and Facebook page. In addition, the WASCA has established strong regional partnerships and support networks with regional schools to ensure reliable and consistent HFD Policy messaging is provided to schools across a variety of mediums. Nevertheless, there may be further opportunities to increase the promotion of these training sessions to regional schools to increase uptake and bridge the gap between metropolitan and regional HFD Policy compliance. No other significant differences between metropolitan and regional schools were identified.

### **2019-20 Achievements**

The 2020 survey results reflect the continued support being provided to schools by the WASCA to support implementation and compliance with the HFD Policy. Despite the significant challenges faced by WA schools and the WASCA as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, some specific examples of WASCA's activities and achievements in 2019-20 include (but are not limited to):

- 84 new tools and resources were developed to support schools to implement the policy, all of which are available online;
- a total of 602 people completed training, including online (n=312) and face to face (n=290) during 21 training and capacity building sessions;
- tailored support and advice were provided to 672 schools, an increase of 61 per cent compared to the previous year;
- 25 per cent increase in WASCA website traffic, predominantly due to an increase in communication to schools on the development of COVID-19-safe practices and training for school canteens;
- follow up phone calls on completed menu assessments to further evaluate Policy compliance and understand any additional implementation barriers. Key results showed: 64 per cent of schools had removed red items, and 72

per cent reduced the number of savoury items offered to no more than 2 days per week; and

- ongoing involvement with the Federation of Canteens in Schools (FOCiS) network, specifically in developing the national School canteen online training, launched in August 2019.

In 2019- 2020, WASCA continued to provide advice and support to the Department of Education to inform a review of the HFD Policy, which is likely to be incorporated into the broader Student Health Care Policy, release date to be advised. While the HFD Policy itself will remain unchanged, combining policies may strengthen the HFD Policy, increase response rate and reinforce a whole of school approach to healthy eating while promoting the link between nutrition and learning. If this change is made, it will be important to monitor its impact on compliance with the HFD Policy.

## Survey limitations

Although the survey response rate increased by 15 per cent in 2020, the increase in response was among primary schools only (metropolitan and regional). This reduces the ability to generalise these findings to all schools across WA as it may result in a selective sample of schools and an overestimation of compliance across the state. A strong response rate across all WA schools to this survey is critical for a reliable evaluation of the HFD Project.

The survey relies on self-reported policy compliance, and there may be a substantial gap between self-reported and independent, objectively measured compliance.

It is unconfirmed if the survey is being delegated to other staff by school principals that are time-poor; as a result, the respondent may not objectively answer the survey.

## Summary

Currently in WA, almost one-quarter of children aged 5 to 15 years of age are above a healthy weight. Schools are extremely well-positioned to support healthy eating behaviours and play a crucial role in a comprehensive public health approach to prevent childhood obesity. Canteen/food services are an integral part of the school environment and can assist in establishing children's healthy eating behaviours whilst at school and subsequently throughout adulthood.

The administration of the WA HFD School Principal Survey and dissemination of results is important to assist schools to remain focussed on HFD Policy compliance and implementation, encourage information sharing across jurisdictions, and promote open and accountable reporting. In 2021, the Global Obesity Centre at Deakin University created Australia's Food Environment Dashboard as part of a larger project to facilitate reporting mechanisms, incentives and support systems for tackling obesity and creating healthier food environments (the Food Policy Index)<sup>10</sup>. The WA HFD School Principal Survey, which includes data on food in school

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<sup>10</sup> Food Policy Index Australia, [Available from: <https://www.foodpolicyindex.org.au/>]

settings<sup>11</sup>, is a useful data source for the Food Policy Index to describe the current food environment in WA public schools.

The HFD Policy and monitoring of the Policy through the WA HFD School Principal Survey supports national and Western Australian agendas for obesity prevention and aligns with the WA Health Promotion Strategic Framework 2017-2021<sup>12</sup>, the Sustainable Health Review<sup>13</sup> recommendation to halt the rise in obesity in WA by July 2024. Furthermore, it is essential to assist in addressing key areas of priority for the Department of Education and Department of Health.

Generally, the 2020 survey results are encouraging, however, there remains room for all schools to increase their level of compliance with the Policy, in particular:

- increase the number of schools with and without a canteen food service to develop a healthy eating policy;
- ensure red food and drink items from canteens/food services, even on an occasional basis, are kept off the menu across all schools;
- reduce the number of days per week amber savoury commercial products are offered across all schools;
- increase the number of regional canteen/food service supervisors, employers and canteen service volunteers who complete traffic light training and FoodSafe training;
- increase the number of K-12 employees and canteen/food service volunteers who complete traffic light training and FoodSafe training.
- increase the number of whole of school activities that schools conduct to promote healthy eating, in particular:
  - working with the school canteen to adopt the Health Promoting Schools Framework;
  - working with the school canteen to promote 'healthy eating days' across all schools; and

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<sup>11</sup> Australia's Food Environment Dashboard 2021, [Available from: <https://foodenvironmentdashboard.com.au/>]

<sup>12</sup> WA Health Promotion Strategic Framework 2017-2021, [Available from: [WA Health Promotion Strategic Framework](#)]

<sup>13</sup> Sustainable Health Review: Final Report to the Western Australian Government. Department of Health, Western Australia 2019 [Available from: <https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/improving-WA-Health/Sustainable-health-review/Final-report> ]

- include nutrition advice or information in school newsletters at least once per term.

## Recommendations

1. The Department of Education continues to administer the annual WA HFD School Principal Survey of public schools and invite the Department of Health to analyse the results.
2. The HFD Reference Group reviews and updates, as required, the WA HFD School Principal Survey questions to maintain relevance.
3. The Department of Education continues to implement strategies designed to increase the response rate for future WA HFD School Principal Surveys, for example, ensuring:
  - the survey is open for the appropriate amount of time;
  - survey links are working correctly;
  - respondents are aware of the number of responses required and how long the survey will take to complete;
  - respondents are aware of the purpose and significance of the survey; and
  - that the most appropriate person is responding to the survey, e.g. school principals;
  - follow-up internal Ed-e-mail reminders and emails are sent to schools.

In addition, it is recommended that strategies are implemented to identify and attract schools that have not completed the WA HFD School Principal Survey in the past three years. This may include increased promotion to these schools to increase the response rate.

4. Both the Department of Education and Department of Health support the WASCA to conduct independent evaluation of the HFD Project delivery and policy compliance. Independent objective evaluation of HFD Policy and Project activities is in line with best practice. This type of evaluation assists in enabling the development of strategies by the WASCA to increase policy compliance.
5. The Department of Education, Department of Health, and the WASCA continue to make the WA HFD School Principal Survey results and summary

results publicly available (e.g. on the Department of Education Policy webpage and the WASCA webpage) as done in previous years.

6. Continuation of quarterly HFD Reference Group meetings with the Department of Health, Department of Education, and the WASCA, to ensure all parties are kept informed and updated on the status of the HFD Policy and Project activities throughout the school year. In addition, the Reference Group continues to work with the WASCA to:

a) provide targeted support to schools to meet HFD Policy criteria, (particularly to remove red items from school canteen/food service menus and number of days per week amber savoury commercial products are offered), for example:

- i. tailored training sessions for schools to ensure relevance of topics and networking opportunities;
- ii. WASCA to develop marketing messages and fact sheets specifically focussing on HFD Policy, for P&C Associations, teachers, principals and health professionals on the benefits of healthy eating and awareness of the HFD Policy;
- iii. increased focus on canteen staff identifying and removing red drinks from menus by: developing fact sheets; increase social media i.e. red alerts; greater focus on drinks in Traffic light training; and
- iv. WASCA to investigate qualitative data from all training sessions that will assist in Policy implementation;

b) provide targeted support to all schools to increase all training activities (particularly in regional schools); for example, WASCA to increase engagement in regional WA schools to promote HFD Policy compliance and support, such as the traffic light training and FoodSafe training; including promoting training opportunities via newsletters and social media pages; increase online participation for all training.

c) increase education and awareness of the HFD Policy to P&C Associations in schools to increase engagement, implementation and compliance with the HFD Policy. Recommendation to:

- v. develop practical tools and resources on how to conduct healthy P&C activities in schools that align with the Policy, such as healthy fundraising events;
  - vi. deliver small group workshops specifically for P&C representatives;  
and
  - vii. increase collaboration with WACSSO to ensure alignment of activities.
- d) provide targeted support to all schools, i.e. those with and without canteens, to increase the number of schools with a written policy for the provision of healthy food and drinks; and
- e) increased focus on partnerships with organisations to increase awareness of the HFD Policy such as: WA Primary Principals Association; WA Secondary Schools Executive Association; WA District High Schools Administrators Association; Refresh.ED.

# Appendix 1 – Traffic light categorisation examples provided by the WASCA

## Department of Education's Healthy Food and Drink policy

### What's on the menu

		
<p><b>Green</b> food and drinks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cereal foods – wholegrain cereals, pasta, noodles, rice, <del>cous</del>, quinoa</li> <li>• A variety of bread types including wholegrain/ wholemeal</li> <li>• Vegetables and legumes e.g. stuffed potatoes, corn-on-cob, baked beans, 4 bean mix, garden salads, potato salad, coleslaw (using reduced fat <u>dressings</u>)</li> <li>• Fruit, fresh and frozen, whole, fruit salad, sliced fruit</li> <li>• Fruit canned in natural juice</li> <li>• <u>A variety of sandwich/roll fillings</u>, preferably served with salad e.g.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- egg</li> <li>- reduced fat cheese</li> <li>- <u>tuna</u>, canned in spring water or brine</li> <li>- lean meats i.e. roast beef</li> <li>- yeast spreads</li> <li>- hummus</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Lean meats, fish, poultry</li> <li>• Meals<sup>†</sup>, especially those with vegetables e.g. pasta bake, curry and rice, frittata, soup, sushi, rice paper rolls</li> <li>• Reduced fat dairy products including:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- plain milk</li> <li>- flavoured milk (375mL or less)</li> <li>- cheese</li> <li>- plain and flavoured yoghurt</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Plain water</li> <li>• Plain mineral water</li> </ul>	<p><b>Amber</b> food and drinks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Savoury breads such as garlic, herb and pizza bases</li> <li>• Reduced fat pastry items<sup>†</sup></li> <li>• <del>Frankfurts</del> and sausages for hot dogs and/or sausage sizzles<sup>†</sup></li> <li>• Savoury commercial products, e.g. fish, chicken, potato portions, pizza<sup>†</sup></li> <li>• Hamburger patties<sup>†</sup></li> <li>• Processed meat e.g. ham, skin-free processed chicken</li> <li>• Assorted cakes/biscuits or muffins<sup>†</sup></li> <li>• Sweet and savoury snack foods<sup>†</sup></li> <li>• Plain dried fruit</li> <li>• Ice creams and icy poles<sup>†</sup></li> <li>• Reduced fat flavoured milk (more than 375mL &amp; less than 600mL)</li> <li>• High schools only: reduced fat coffee flavoured milk (375mL or less)</li> <li>• Full fat dairy products e.g. plain milk, yoghurt, cheese</li> <li>• Full fat flavoured milk (375mL or less)</li> <li>• 99% fruit juices (250mL or less) and no added sugar</li> <li>• Dairy desserts<sup>†</sup> e.g. reduced fat custard, ice cream and mousse (milk/milk alternative listed as first ingredient)</li> </ul> <p><i>NOTE: Reduced fat dairy recommended for children over the age of 2 years</i></p>	<p><b>Red</b> food and drinks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full-fat pastry items</li> <li>• Deep fried food</li> <li>• Sweet sandwich fillings e.g. jam, honey, confectionery sprinkles</li> <li>• High fat meats e.g. <del>polony</del> and salami</li> <li>• Confectionery e.g. chocolate, liquorice, cough lollies, jellies</li> <li>• Sweet or savoury snack items that do not meet the criteria e.g. potato chips</li> <li>• Soft drinks, cordial, sports drinks, energy drinks</li> <li>• Reduced fat flavoured milk (more than 600mL)</li> <li>• Reduced fat coffee flavoured milk drink (more than 375mL)</li> <li>• Full fat flavoured milk (more than 375mL)</li> <li>• Chocolate coated ice-creams</li> <li>• Jelly; fruit with jelly</li> <li>• Croissants, cream or iced buns/cakes, doughnuts, sweet pastries, slices</li> <li>• Fruit juice (more than 250mL) and/or with added sugar or sweetener</li> <li>• Water flavoured with fruit juice, sugar and/or sweetener</li> </ul>



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