

Corner stores capture kids on morning commute

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In most cities, the corner store, with its chips, soda and candy, is ubiquitous. Convenient for the neighborhood residents, but also researchers are discovering, a major snack source for school age children.

Researchers from Temple University and The Food Trust recently examined the eating habits of urban children before and after school as part of a larger project to make corner store snacks healthier. Their findings will be presented at The Obesity Society's annual scientific meeting on Saturday, October 4, 2008.

"We realized that a majority of kids were eating and drinking on their way to and from school and that the corner stores were playing a big role," said lead researcher Stephanie Vander Veur, MPH, director of clinical research at Temple University's Center for Obesity Research and Education.

The majority of the students, from seven Philadelphia middle schools, were African American (47.1%) followed by Hispanic (19.7%), Asian (18.2%) and White (11.9%). Almost half of the children were overweight or obese, with approximately three-quarters walking to and from school. The researchers found that about 70 percent of the students bought food or drink on their commute to school, spending about \$3.00 a day.

Studies have found that school-based interventions can be very effective

in preventing overweight and obesity in large groups of students. But because the external environment - home, corner stores, restaurants - can undermine school programs, researchers are examining what kids are consuming outside of school, as well as how to make these environments healthier.

That's why Temple and The Food Trust are working on the Corner Store project.

"We're teaching children about making healthier choices in schools, using social marketing to reinforce nutrition information, giving students the opportunity to be advocates for healthier choices in their own communities and working with store owners to stock fresh fruit and other healthy snacks for youngsters to buy," said Sandy Sherman of The Food Trust. "By involving kids in the process, we're ensuring that the messages really appeal to kids."

"Because many Philadelphia students walk to school, it's important that we couple our school-based prevention programs with efforts to improve the snacks and drinks for sale on their way to and from school," said Vander Veur.

Source: Temple University

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