

School lunchbox inspections 'perverse'

May 29 2015, by Robert Burgin



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

A University of Queensland health expert has labelled the practice of inspecting children's lunchboxes at school as both "perverse" and unlikely to improve children's health.

Associate Professor Michael Gard of the School of Human Movement and Nutrition Sciences said hysteria about childhood obesity was fuelling a range of [school](#)-based practices that infringed the rights of parents to

choose how they raise and care for children.

"Panic around obesity appears to trump all other concerns in the current climate," Dr Gard said.

"Despite quite well-known data that Australian rates of [childhood obesity](#) have changed very little over the last 15 to 20 years, this is an issue that still tends to be discussed in breathlessly apocalyptic terms.

"Yes, too many children are overweight, but the hysteria we have created is out of proportion to the problem.

"As a result, we now have a kind of Wild West situation in which some schools, often with the best of intentions, have decided to take matters into their own hands.

"In this environment, the lunchbox inspection appears to have become a quite 'normal' and acceptable practice."

Dr Gard, the author of the recently-published "Schools and Public Health: Past, Present Future" book, said he had spoken to many parents and teachers concerned about lunchbox 'blitzes'.

He described it as an "invasive" practice, unlikely to deliver health benefits of any kind.

"We know that many health-related activities that happen in schools make a very marginal difference to children's health, particularly in areas such as smoking and sex education," Dr Gard said.

"Although widely used and popular among politicians and law enforcement, the US anti-drugs program DARE has been shown to be largely ineffective.

"Rather than making a difference to young people's drug use, DARE's value is symbolic because it allows people to stand up and point to what they are doing to address the problem.

"Lunchbox blitzes are similar in that they make sense in the context of obesity hysteria, but without any evidence that they improve health their real impact is to shame kids at school and embarrass or outrage parents at home.

"Perhaps the most dispiriting aspect of the lunchbox inspection is that it seems to rest on the assumption that the teacher knows more about what children need and how they should be parented than parents themselves."

Dr Gard said the concern about lunchbox inspections was part of a wider debate about the [public health](#) role of schools and how far public health concerns should be allowed to infringe on schools' educational work.

Provided by University of Queensland

Citation: School lunchbox inspections 'perverse' (2015, May 29) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-05-school-lunchbox-perverse.html>

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