

Retailers contributing to obesity crisis

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Banning fast food shops near schools won't be enough to tackle childhood obesity, University of Hertfordshire academics revealed today. With secondary school pupils travelling further afield to buy foods high in fat and sugar, food retailers have a major role to play to encourage them to make healthier food choices.

The briefing paper – "Within Arm's Reach: School Neighbourhoods and

"Young People's Food Choices" focuses on 11 – 16 year olds across the UK. Produced for the Food Research Collaboration (FRC), it explores factors that inform food and drink purchasing around schools.

In recent years much has been done to improve school meals and the limited availability of some popular but less healthy foods in secondary schools may have resulted in unintended consequences. Many young people are turning to fast [food outlets](#), supermarkets and [convenience stores](#) outside school to buy their lunch, which can represent 23% of their daily food intake. Peer pressure coupled with perceptions that eating healthily isn't 'cool' may also be contributory factors.

Wendy Wills, Lead Researcher for Food and Public Health Research at the University of Hertfordshire, commented: "The food and drink sold on the high street to young people is a source of concern, in terms of the current public health agenda around obesity and nutrition. However, simply banning [fast food](#) outlets close to schools will not be enough to bring about change."

"We need a thoughtful but hard hitting approach that engages retailers as well as young people, schools and parents to create a wholesale shift in expectation about what kinds of food and drink we want our children and teenagers to buy. This briefing paper shows that a great deal of thought and action is still required", continued Wendy.

Possible solutions

The researchers involved in this study argue that food outlets could offer 'supersize' promotions for healthy foods and not just for items such as crisps and sugary drinks to help drive down obesity. School cafeterias should provide a better dining experience - a crucial factor in improving [young people's](#) food purchasing habits. Their need to be with friends is of vital importance and cafeterias need to do more to be seen as an

acceptable social space, whilst promoting 'tasty' rather than 'healthy' food.

Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy at City University London and Chair of the FRC, said: "When children go to school, one might think that they'd be safe from food pressures. This briefing paper shows this is not quite true. While the Prime Minister wrestles with what to do about children being targeted by sugary drinks, we suggest that any strategy he comes up with simply must build a safe and healthy [food](#) environment for kids. If this was drugs, there'd be a scandal!"

Provided by University of Hertfordshire

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