

Healthier vending



Contents

Introduction	3
Benefits of healthier vending	3
What is healthier vending?	4
Step by step plan	5
Healthier vending checklist	12
Integrating with other school food projects	13
Curriculum links	14
Sources of further information	16





Introduction

This healthier vending guidance is intended to help schools establish healthier food and drink vending as an attractive, useful and profitable service. It will help inform schools and caterers on the practical implications of using vending in schools.

From April 2008, the nutritional standards for school lunches have been extended to include all other food and drinks provided in schools. This will cover vending machines and therefore schools and caterers need to ensure that any food or drink provided meets the standards. For example, crisps, sweets, chocolate bars, cereal bars and fizzy or sugary drinks can no longer be provided.

For further information please refer to the nutritional standards for other food and drinks in schools which is available from the school meal section of the Department of Education's website at www.deni.gov.uk

Benefits of healthier vending

Implementing a healthier vending policy:

- can encourage healthier eating habits;
- extends existing food provision throughout the school day, eg breakfast, break time, lunch and after school;
- increases the variety of food and drinks available;
- offers a 'grab and go' opportunity to busy pupils and staff;
- reduces queues at peak periods, eg lunch-time service;
- helps keep pupils on site during the day;
- may generate income for the school.

What is healthier vending?

Many schools have vending machines and although vending may have been criticised in the past, there is no reason why it cannot provide a range of food and drink in line with nutritional standards and which is supportive of a whole school food approach. Healthier vending may help generate income for your school.

Vending should not be looked at in isolation, but as part of the planning for the whole school food service. The vending service should reflect the objectives of your whole school food policy.

Guidelines about the use and contents of vending machines should be discussed and implemented in order to meet whole school objectives and to promote healthier choices and a balanced diet. These may include:

- working with the catering service to investigate the use of chilled vending;
- changing the casing of the machines so that no, or minimal, advertising of product brands is displayed;
- working with suppliers and vendors to offer healthier choices;
- using chilled and ambient vending machines alongside each other in order to offer a broader range of options, eg sandwiches, yogurts and fresh fruit.

Case study

Although the vending machine at a large integrated school made a loss initially, it started to make a small profit after promotional activities, and proved enormously popular with pupils. The pupils were surveyed and reported a keen interest in health and healthier eating. Sandwiches and baguettes are now the best sellers.

Step by step plan

1. Getting started

No matter what type of vending your school is planning or already provides, it is important that it is undertaken as part of a whole school approach and not in isolation. A useful start is to develop a whole school food policy, enabling your school to write a rationale for vending in your school (see booklet two: *Establishing a whole school food policy*). This will ensure that this particular aspect of food service provision complements, rather than works against, your school ethos and approach to healthier eating and drinking.

Commitment from the senior management of the school and the catering service (especially if it is involved in vending provision) is important to the success of healthier vending. This should be established during the preliminary discussion on the rationale and purpose of the service. Each party should examine the potential benefits available to them and to those they represent, and then set these against the resources required.

The whole school community should be considered when setting up healthier vending. All who have access to the school site are potential customers, so their needs are worth considering. A working group should be set up and include representation from:

- pupils
- school management
- catering staff and managers
- teaching staff
- parents and governors
- local community, eg health professionals.

The working group should consider the following points:

- the type of food and drink sold;
- the type of vending machine required, eg chilled or ambient;
- how many people will use the machine and when;
- price range (of products);
- what will happen when the school is closed during holiday time;
- where foods can be sourced, eg school caterer or vendor;
- where the machines will be located;
- who will be responsible for the day to day operation;
- whether there are any training needs, eg food hygiene;
- how accessible the machine will be, eg time controls;
- budget for the machine (either leased or purchased) and maintenance contracts;
- how items will be paid for – cash, or cashless.

Step by step plan

2. Deciding what to sell

Healthier vending should reflect healthier eating messages by offering a range of food and drinks. All food and drinks provided must meet the new nutritional standards for school lunches and other food and drinks in schools. Use the eatwell plate to help you decide on a balance of foods (you can find it at www.eatwell.gov.uk or see booklet 1: *The essential guide*).

When choosing products for healthier vending, you should select those that are lower in salt, fat and sugar. As a school you need to discuss what is best for your healthier vending. Speak to the school catering service and try to complement what is for sale in the dining room. Find out what the school community would like to see available. The product range could be discussed at the school council or school nutrition action group (SNAG). It would also be useful to involve a local community dietitian or school nurse.

What can healthier vending offer?

Chilled vending

This will depend on the vending machine but examples could include:

- Fresh fruit, prepared fruit salads and dried fruits
- Filled rolls, sandwiches and baguettes
- Scones with low-fat spread
- Salads
- Pasta mixes
- Low sugar breakfast cereals, with semi-skimmed milk
- Yogurts, fromage frais
- Pizza slices (with thick bases and less cheese)
- Semi-skimmed milk
- Water
- Fruit or vegetable juices
- Yogurt drinks (< 5% added sugar)

Ambient vending

- Fruit
- Unsalted or non-sugared popcorn
- Flavoured semi-skimmed milk (UHT)* (< 5% added sugar)
- Water
- Fruit juice (>50% fruit content)

* The semi-skimmed milk in these products will be at room temperature.

3. Consider the practical issues

Packaging

If your vending machines contain food made by the school caterer or an outside provider, you will need to consider the type of packaging used and its labelling. For example, glass containers are not appropriate for school use for safety reasons. The caterer may already use packaging for some items which would be appropriate for chilled vending, eg plastic sandwich containers or plastic salad bowls with lids. Other products may be displayed on a tray, covered in plastic wrap, eg slices of quiche or pizza.

The products should be clearly labelled so that pupils can:

- select the product they wish to eat:
- read the ingredient list, eg to avoid ingredients because of allergy, cultural, religious or ethical reasons.

Planogram

A planogram is a plan of the layout of the products in your vending machine. This should be developed after the product mix has been decided and with pupil involvement. Products which are at eye level, or at the level of the coin slot, will sell better as these are the first products seen as pupils decide what to purchase. Try to vary the position of food products in the machine to keep pupils' interest and promote new foods.

Product sourcing

Vending products can most conveniently be sourced by the catering service, or the vending machine vendor. Alternatively the products can be made at school. Depending on the type of vending, the school caterer may make, stock and manage the products for sale, eg sandwiches, baguettes and salads.

Product waste

Monitoring waste will ensure that the product mix can be reviewed. It would be useful to consider the shelf life of each product, monitor 'best before' and 'use by' dates every time machines are filled. However, this should not compromise the school rationale for providing healthier options.

Step by step plan

Food hygiene and safety

This is particularly important for fresh food and drinks that need to be temperature controlled or chilled. The preparation, storage and siting of all produce should comply with the school's health and safety policies. Remember to:

- clean machines regularly;
- ensure all products are labelled, especially if they contain a particular food allergen;
- check 'best before' and 'use by' dates every time machines are filled;
- rotate products and place new products at the back.

Price

The range of prices pupils are prepared to pay for vending foods reflects their age and the relative wealth of the school's catchment area. While it is important to offer a wide range of products at varying prices, it is imperative to suit the product mix to pupils' pockets. Research indicates that pricing healthier options competitively is associated with increases in the purchase of these items. In addition, even if water is provided via vending, a free source of water should also be easily accessible for all pupils to use throughout the school day.

4. Deciding on the type of vending

Different types of vending machines have different characteristics and are built specifically to vend particular products. Ensure that there is a good match between the capability and characteristics of the machine and the products you wish to vend. Be aware that new machines and products will become available to meet new demand as industry recognises the commercial potential and the need for healthier options.

You may already have machines that can be restocked to ensure that greater choice is made available to pupils. If you want to source a vending machine, contact the Automatic Vending Association (www.ava-vending.co.uk). They have a sector on vending in post-primary schools.

Vending options

Machine:	Ambient foods	Chilled foods	Chilled cans, cartons, etc
Design	Products may be held on a suspended hook or by a spiral coil, which the user can see through a glass front, with the food items falling into a food dispensing area.	Some have rotating drums. Their ability to display products is limited but they can hold different shapes and sizes of food and drink products.	Basic mechanical gravity system. These machines include cooling systems and therefore require a power connection.
Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fresh fruit • fruit pots (shelf-stable) • rice cakes • unsalted or non-sugared popcorn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sandwiches, rolls, baguettes • pizza slices • yogurts • fresh fruit • fruit juices • fresh semi-skimmed milk • flavoured semi-skimmed milk (UHT) • water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • water • fresh semi-skimmed milk • flavoured semi-skimmed milk (UHT) • fruit juices
Shelf life	Two to three months depending on product.	Three days to three months depending on product.	Four days to 12 months depending on product.

The machine suppliers will usually offer specific service contracts for maintenance and repairs. Although new machines will come with a one year warranty, whether purchasing or leasing new or second-hand machines it is vital to ensure your service agreement guarantees a quick response time and that there are no hidden extras. If in doubt, check with the Automatic Vending Association, which offers advice and information on its website on a wide range of affiliated companies and products.

Step by step plan

5. Where to place the vending machine

An advantage of vending is that food and drink can be accessed throughout the school day, including:

- when the usual catering facilities are closed;
- when there are heavy queues at break and lunch times;
- when speed of service and eating on the go are important to pupils, eg for pupils wishing to attend a lunch-time club or a sports game.

The location of your vending machine is a key factor. If possible, it is best to place it near to the catering area to make

filling, maintenance and supervision of the machine as easy as possible and to ensure service continuity (especially if your healthier vending is run by the school caterer). You will need to check with the board catering services if they provide the school food.

Access to vending, for example when the canteen is closed, is also important and a source of extra revenue if there are opportunities for purchases before and after school. If the machine is situated inside a dining room that closes at certain times, these opportunities are missed and the service is denied, although the machine is better secured against vandalism and abuse.



Litter

- Provide large, secure, attractive litter bins for each vending machine.
- Encourage appropriate pupil behaviour through the existing school policy.
- Discuss the issue of litter management within areas of social education in the curriculum.
- Recycle or compost waste, perhaps for use in your school growing club.

6. Managing healthier vending in your school

Successful management and administration relies on the involvement and cooperation of pupils. By seeking their advice and ensuring widespread understanding of the initiative, its purpose and operation, you will minimise problems and maximise use. For example, some chilled machines enable pupils to remove food from behind a door. This can also mean that other objects can be placed in the machine. However, schools have found that the novelty soon disappears and good positioning of the machine reduces this type of behaviour from the beginning.

For good sales, ensure that pupils can access a variety of food and drink throughout the day. This can be achieved by:

- ensuring that popular products are replenished promptly;
- monitoring the vending machines regularly to check working order;
- helping pupils access the food and drink they want.

The key influences on sales, other than a good product mix, will be the pupils' perception of the consistency, reliability, and efficiency of the service the machine offers.

7. Promoting healthier vending

It is worth spending some time raising awareness of vending and its rationale through a wide variety of means, prior to, and after, launch. This could include:

- announcements in year assemblies, within the context of a broader nutrition message;
- raising awareness with pupils through discussion about the scheme and its rationale within their tutor groups;
- pricing healthier options competitively;
- establishing theme or special event days, offering different or unusual foods;
- creating a poster display for healthier vending;
- introducing new products routinely to maintain interest;
- writing about the scheme in the school newsletter;
- holding taster sessions for the proposed products.

Step by step plan

8. Evaluation

It is important to monitor and evaluate your healthier vending. You could:

- monitor the use and commercial success of the machine, eg product type, numbers sold wasted, refills, pupil response;
- use a proforma to ensure standardisation and appropriate collection of data;
- identify 'best sellers' and 'not doing very well' products, and analyse these results with your working group, especially pupils.

Healthier vending checklist

- ✓ Have you identified the benefits of healthier vending for your school?
- ✓ Are you clear about what you want to achieve?
- ✓ Have you involved the school council or SNAG?
- ✓ Have you talked to the school catering service?
- ✓ Have you talked to the senior management team and got their support?
- ✓ Are your pupils involved?
- ✓ Have you decided when and where the vending machine will be available for use?
- ✓ Have you planned the product mix and pricing?
- ✓ Do all the foods and drinks meet the nutritional standards for school food?
- ✓ Have you identified who will manage and administer the vending service?
- ✓ Are there arrangements for collecting litter?
- ✓ Have you planned a strategy to promote healthier vending?
- ✓ Have you planned how you are going to monitor and evaluate the impact of your healthier vending service?

Integrating with other school food projects

There are many natural links which can be made to other school food projects, depending on your school. Links to healthier vending could include:

- Making available healthier food and drink items in vending machines to extend the variety of lunch, eg fruit skewers, mini sandwiches, yogurts.
- Providing chilled water in the product range you offer, while ensuring that other sources of water are freely available.
- Offering complementary products to support healthier breaks.
- Using vending to help reduce queues at busy times.
- Reviewing the use, position and style of the vending machines in the dining room. Are they well presented? Do they support healthier eating messages?

Case study

A large post-primary school in a rural setting installed two chilled vending machines selling a variety of products made in-house by the school caterers. These included pasta dishes, sandwiches, salads and fresh semi-skimmed milk (which proved to be the most popular item). Both machines made a profit and significantly reduced queuing problems in the dining room.



Curriculum links

Healthier vending provides a context for a wide variety of curriculum links, a few of which are listed below.

Post-primary

Mathematics and numeracy

Pupils could record product sales and income generated using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets to predict future sales patterns, supply requirements and review planograms.

Learning for life and work

Home economics – pupils could liaise with the school caterers and healthier vending machine staff to investigate a range of food and drinks which support healthier eating in a consistent manner, eg is low in salt and saturated fat, whilst still being appetising to 11–14 year olds.

The arts

Art and design – pupils could design and produce creative outcomes for a display around the vending machine illustrating the importance of a balanced diet.

For further advice and suggestions, visit:

www.ccea.org.uk

www.nicurriculum.org.uk



Sources of further information

The following list provides links to further resources and information that may support you in developing your healthier vending service.

School Food Trust

www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk

The School Food Trust provides an information booklet called *A fresh look at vending in schools*, which provides detailed information on school vending and useful checklists.

Automatic Vending Association

www.ava-vending.co.uk

Everything you ever wanted to know about vending. The Automatic Vending Association (AVA) represents all sectors – machine manufacturers and distributors, suppliers of commodities and operators.

Food Standards Agency

www.food.gov.uk

The *Vending healthier drinks* report is available from this site.

Health Education Trust

www.healthedtrust.com

The Health Education Trust is a UK registered charity, formed to promote the development of health education for young people in the UK. The site contains information on healthier vending.

This resource was originally developed and produced by the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland as part of the School food: top marks programme. It was jointly funded by the Department of Education and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety.