

**For discussion
on 12 March 2019**

Legislative Council Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene

Initiatives on the reduction of salt and sugar in food

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the Government's initiatives to promote territory-wide salt and sugar reduction.

Background

2. Excessive sodium intake may cause hypertension, fatal stroke and coronary heart disease. Excessive sugar intake may lead to obesity and dental caries, and obesity is a risk factor for hypertension, heart disease and diabetes.

3. The World Health Organisation recommends that adults consume less than 5g of salt daily (i.e. slightly less than 1 level teaspoon of salt), and adults' and children's intake of free sugar should make up less than 10% of the total energy intake per day¹.

4. According to the findings of the Population Health Survey 2014/2015 of the Department of Health (DH), Hong Kong people aged 15 to 84 had an average daily salt intake of 8.8g. Nearly 50% of them were overweight and obese, about 28% had hypertension and more than 8% had diabetes.

5. The Food and Health Bureau (FHB) and DH announced "Towards 2025: Strategy and Action Plan to Prevent and Control Non-communicable Diseases in Hong Kong" in May last year. The targets include achieving a 30% relative reduction in the mean population daily intake of sodium, halting the rise in diabetes and obesity, and containing the prevalence of raised blood pressure by 2025.

¹ For an adult having a 2000-Kcal diet per day, the daily free sugar intake should be less than 50g (i.e. about 10 sugar cubes).

Measures to promote a low-salt-low-sugar dietary culture

6. FHB, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the Committee on Reduction of Salt and Sugar in Food (CRSS)² promote territory-wide salt and sugar reduction through five directions. Details are as follow:

“Starting from an early age”

7. DH has been promoting healthy eating, including less-salt-and-sugar diets, at kindergartens and child care centres through the “StartSmart@school.hk” Campaign. Starting from 2018/19 school year, DH has launched the Healthy Drinks at School Charter. As at to-date, more than 350 kindergartens and child care centres (i.e. about 34% of kindergartens and child care centres in Hong Kong) have participated in the Charter and pledged to provide children with water and healthy drinks, not to provide drinks with added sugar or a relatively high sugar content, and not to use food as a reward.

8. DH has launched the Salt Reduction Scheme for School Lunches since 2017/18 school year, with a view to gradually reducing the sodium level of school lunches for primary students. So far, 12 school lunch suppliers joined the Scheme and provided over 1 500 sodium-reduced lunch options to about 490 primary schools in Hong Kong (i.e. about 85% of primary schools in Hong Kong). DH’s target is to reduce the average sodium level of primary school lunches by 5% to 10% per year, with a view to cutting the average sodium level of primary school lunches down to not more than 500mg in ten years. In 2017/18 school year, the average sodium content of primary school lunch decreased by 14% as compared to that of 2013, meeting the Scheme’s sodium reduction target for 2018.

Enhancing transparency of information

9. We launched the “Salt/Sugar” Label Scheme for Prepackaged Food Products in October 2017 to facilitate the public to identify more easily prepackaged food products which meet the legal definition of “low salt”, “no salt”, “low sugar” and “no sugar”. At present, the labels are displayed on more than 230 prepackaged food products. We will step up the promotion of those labels and encourage more manufacturers / importers to display the labels onto their

² CRSS members include persons from the medical profession, dietitians, academics, the media sector, the food trade, the education sector, and an organisation representing consumer rights.

prepackaged food products.

Encourage restaurants to reduce salt and sugar

10. Since January this year, more than 500 restaurants involving over 100 brand names have supported our salt and sugar reduction scheme and provided customers with options of reduced salt and/or sugar or tailor-made less salt and sugar dishes. We will encourage more restaurants to participate in the scheme.

Reformulation of prepackaged food products

11. Several large-scale food manufacturers have reformulated, or undertaken to reformulate, their prepackaged food products, covering various types of drinks, instant noodles and soups. We will continue to proactively discuss with the trade on product reformulation, and motivate more manufacturers in Hong Kong to participate in the salt and sugar reduction campaign.

Strengthening publicity and education

12. The Government and the CRSS have been carrying out a wide range of publicity and educational efforts through various channels, including television, social media, the Facebook and Instagram pages on “Hong Kong’s Action on Salt & Sugar Reduction”, promotional activities and competitions. In February this year, we organised a large-scale promotional event to promote a less-salt-and-sugar dietary culture and new living style. We will continue to strengthen publicity and education so that the less-salt-and-sugar dietary culture will take root in the community.

Advice sought

13. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Food and Health Bureau

Centre for Food Safety, Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

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