

## School Food Policies and Practices for Young Children in Primary Schools

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### ABSTRACT

*The objective of this paper was to assess the extent and nature of healthy eating policies and practices for preschool children in public schools before instituting an intervention to promote healthier eating. The research study was conducted in 47 public primary schools in Phrae Province, Thailand. A questionnaire designed to identify school-children eating practices and school policies were used to interview principals and preschool teachers. In addition, observed information about healthy eating policies in the schools were gathered during the interviews. Prevalence of specific policies and practices in the schools was examined by descriptive statistics. The healthy eating policies implemented by the schools were categorised into four groups: “fully in place”, “partially in place”, “currently under development” and “not in place”. Concerning the school environment, “fully in place” healthy eating policy schools had the following issues implemented: offer sugarless milk to preschool children; provide students enough time to eat lunch in clean, safe and pleasant environment; have all teachers schedule time for students to wash their hands before meals and snacks; and a policy to establish links with nutritional counsellor. Regarding the curriculum, all schools had a policy to help students learn specific nutrition-related skills. All schools encouraged and involved staff, children family members and the community in supporting and reinforcing healthy eating policy. The results showed that although most schools were concerned about healthy eating policy, many policies had not been fully implemented. Therefore, a practical model for schools to implement healthy eating practices is still needed.*

**Key words:** Healthy eating, Policies, Schools, Preschool children, Thailand

### INTRODUCTION

Schools are an important educational, social and physical environment for children. Thus, changes in the school’s environment can have an important impact on students’ health. Food is very important for the health of young children. However, young children cannot easily select appropriate food by themselves. Health-related behaviours are significantly