

## Using behavioural insights to improve the healthiness of children's packed lunches

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### Background

Childhood obesity continues to rise in the UK from 9.3% in children aged 4-5 years to 19.8% by age 10-11. Only 1 in 100 school packed lunches meet national recommendations for school meals in England with 82% containing unhealthy snacks and 61% sugar sweetened drinks. Encouraging parents to identify healthier choices could reduce added sugar content and improve the healthiness of school lunches.

### Methods

A cluster randomised controlled trial was implemented in 17 primary schools (8 intervention, 9 control) in England. The intervention comprised of 3 packs of materials delivered to parents who make children lunches (7-11 years). Materials were designed using behavioural-insights to raise awareness of added sugar and offer healthier options. The materials were delivered over a 4-week period in intervention schools. Photographs of the contents of the packed lunches were taken at 3 time points; 1719 pre-intervention, 1745 post-intervention & 1725 at 3 month follow-up. Visible items in each photograph were coded for nutritional content. A parental survey was conducted at post follow up to explore parental knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about healthier packed lunches.

### Results

The coding and analysis is underway and findings will be presented in November. Presented data will describe group differences pre-intervention, post-intervention and follow up from the >5000 lunch boxes for 1) the number lunch boxes that contain surgery food; 2) the average number of sugary food items; 3) the average grams of sugar in lunch boxes; and 4) the proportion of lunch boxes that contain fruit or vegetables.

### Conclusions

This study was funded by Public Health England to explore whether low cost, low intensive interventions can have a significant impact on changing health behaviours. There is a lack of evidence on improving the nutritional quality of packed lunches and if improvements are identified there are potential implications for child health, nutrition and obesity rates.

### Key messages:

- The study aims to ascertain the effectiveness of a behavioural-insight informed intervention in changing the healthiness of packed lunches provided by parents of primary school aged children.
- This low cost, low intensity intervention has the potential to improve the healthiness of primary school age children's diets.