

Over 100 EatSmart Schools promote healthy eating among students

The EatSmart School Accreditation Scheme (ESAS), jointly organised by the Department of Health (DH) and the Education Bureau (EDB) since the 2009/10 school year, continues to receive widespread support from the education sector. A total of 112 primary schools have been recognised as EatSmart Schools, the highest honour in the ESAS, in commendation of their all-out efforts in promoting healthy eating on campus so as to maintain the health of students and develop healthy eating habits among them.

Addressing the EatSmart School Accreditation Ceremony 2019 held today (July 2), the Controller of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the DH, Dr Wong Ka-hing, said that so far more than 270 primary schools and special schools in Hong Kong have participated in the ESAS, representing over 40 per cent of all primary schools in Hong Kong. Among them, 141 have attained accreditation, of which 112 achieved the highest honour of EatSmart School. The school accreditation is valid for three years. This year, 16 schools achieved the EatSmart School accreditation for the third consecutive time, and were presented with the Award for Continuous Promotion of Healthy Eating at School.

According to the accreditation criteria of the ESAS, accredited schools have to demonstrate a commitment to continuously implementing administrative measures, providing healthy lunches and snacks in accordance with the nutritional requirements stipulated in the "Nutritional Guidelines on Lunch for Students" and the "Nutritional Guidelines on Snacks for Students" of the DH, and organising educational programmes and publicity events to create a nutrition-friendly school learning environment for students.

The ESAS is a key programme under the EatSmart@school.hk campaign. The campaign's Joyful Fruit Month event and the Salt Reduction Scheme for School Lunches have also received widespread support from stakeholders. This year, a record-breaking total of 1 358 kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools and special schools have participated in the Joyful Fruit Month event. For the Salt Reduction Scheme for School Lunches, 12 participating school lunch suppliers which serve more than 490 primary schools in Hong Kong have provided over 1 800 sodium-reduced school lunch options in the two school years since the launch of the Scheme.

Dr Wong pointed out that according to the Nutrient Testing of School Lunches in Primary Schools in Hong Kong 2018, the average sodium content per lunch dropped significantly from 951 milligrams in 2013 to 818mg in 2018, representing a 14 per cent decrease, which met the target of the Salt Reduction Scheme for School Lunches in reducing the sodium level of school lunches using a gradual approach. Participating school lunch suppliers have also pledged to further increase the supply of sodium-reduced lunch options in the next school year, aiming to turn all lunch choices into sodium-reduced

options in the near future.

Dr Wong said that in addition to having a low-sodium diet, sufficient intake of dietary fibre is also important. However, the same nutrient testing showed that around 40 per cent of school lunches contained insufficient dietary fibre. According to the health data collected by the Student Health Service of the DH in the 2017/18 school year, about 60 per cent of primary school students ate vegetables every day. However, the percentage of students eating enough vegetables – even on days when they ate vegetables – dropped from 49 per cent in the 2015/16 school year to 45 per cent in the 2017/18 school year.

To combat the threat of non-communicable diseases, Dr Wong said that the Government last year launched the "Towards 2025: Strategy and Action Plan to Prevent and Control Non-communicable Diseases in Hong Kong", setting out nine local targets to be achieved by 2025, which include halting the rise in prevalence of raised blood pressure, diabetes and obesity as well as attaining a 30 per cent relative reduction in mean population daily intake of salt/sodium. As such, developing a healthy eating habit is important for students. In this regard, schools, parents and lunch suppliers play vital roles in adopting a low-sodium eating principle at school and at home, as well as encouraging students to consume sufficient vegetables and fruit every day.

Dr Wong said that the support and guidance of the EDB and steering committee members of the campaign over the years have been key to the smooth running of the campaign in the past 13 years. He also expressed his sincere gratitude for the active participation and support of principals, teachers, parents and students from different schools, as well as the co-operation of food suppliers. He appealed to all parties to continue their support for the campaign and help nurture a nutrition-friendly environment for learning and living for students.

Also officiating at the ceremony, the Principal Assistant Secretary (Curriculum Development) (Special Duties) of the EDB, Mr Joe Ng, said, "The EDB has always attached great importance to the development of physical and mental health of students. To lead a healthy lifestyle is one of the learning goals of the school curriculum. Schools can take multiple entry points, including designing different extended learning activities in relevant subjects, organising related contests, participating in the Health Ambassador Scheme and Joyful Fruit Month, to develop in students habits of healthy living. The EDB also encourages schools to follow the guidelines issued by the DH to formulate school-based healthy eating policy and measures. Through home-school co-operation and support from lunch suppliers, schools can make effective use of the nutrition guidelines to improve the health of our students."

More information on the campaign is available at the DH's thematic website (school.eatsmart.gov.hk).