

School is no place for junk food, says Heart & Stroke CEO

UNHEALTHY FOODS have no place in Barbados' schools.

And fast food establishments should be made to follow strict guidelines when targeting children.

That's the view of Heart & Stroke Foundation chief executive officer Gina Pitts, who said removing vendors who sell high sugar, high salt products around schools was the key to resolving the issue of childhood NCDs.

Her comments follow the chairman of the Commission on Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases Sir Trevor Hassell's revelation that a third of local schoolchildren were overweight or obese.

He reportedly said that a 2012 survey in 26 local schools found that 31.5 per cent of children were overweight, while

14.4 per cent were obese.

"Barbados has dietary guidelines, but having one specifically for children... is incredibly important to be enforced by nurseries and preschools through parents," she said.

Pitts called for a national activity centre for young children to be established to counter the issue, which she said was also propelled by unhealthy content of fast food restaurants.

"... Also consider the fast food restaurants, which are also in close vicinities of schools and lower income brackets. They are targeting that vulnerable group that has no knowledge of the content of this food.

"How can this be fair that I know what is in a chicken or burger snack internationally,

but I have no idea what I am eating here in Barbados? Where is the freedom of choice for my family?"

Pitts said there should be a framework put in place to govern the way in which fast food entities marketed their products to children. Any failure to adhere to the stipulated guidelines, she said, should also be castigated.

Pitts noted that the Heart & Stroke Foundation planned to increase their exercise sessions offered to children with cardiovascular disease, including obesity, to twice weekly.

"We [noticed] that parents often struggle to provide regular exercises and a complete diet, either through lack of information, rising food costs, or children choosing to

Beverage Guidelines

As suggested by USDA Smart Snacks in School.

CATEGORY	ELEMENTARY	MIDDLE	HIGH
PLAIN OR CARBONATED WATER	Any size	Any size	Any size
LOW FAT MILK (1%), UNFLAVORED	≤8oz	≤12oz	≤12oz
NON FAT MILK (SKIM), FLAVORED OR UNFLAVORED	≤8oz	≤12oz	≤12oz
100% FRUIT OR VEGETABLE JUICE (plain or carbonated)	≤8oz	≤12oz	≤12oz
100% FRUIT OR VEGETABLE JUICE, DILUTED WITH WATER (plain or carbonated) with no added sugar/sweetener	≤8oz	≤12oz	≤12oz
NO CALORIE BEVERAGES, FLAVORED AND/OR CARBONATED (≤100 calories per 8oz or ≤160 calories per 12oz)	Not permitted	Not permitted	≤20oz
LOW CALORIE BEVERAGES, FLAVORED AND/OR CARBONATED (≤40 calories per 8oz, or ≤60 calories per 12oz)	Not permitted	Not permitted	≤12oz

ditch the diet themselves. As a result parents have their own

lifestyle classes built into this programme," she said. (LT)