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Ministry of Health, Czech Republic
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Our reference: WHO/2025/0107
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Letter of support for update of decree on school canteens

Dear Minister of Health,

on behalf of the World Health Organization (WHO) I wish to express our unequivocal support for the update of decree on school canteens which strengthen the mandatory nutritional standards for school canteens that is currently under consideration. Strengthening nutritional standards are in the best interest of children, aligns closely with WHO's evidence-based recommendations on healthy diets for adults and children. Children spend considerable time in schools and the recommendations apply to foods and beverages children consume in educational settings and represents an important step towards ending the accelerating epidemic of childhood obesity in the Czech Republic.

The WHO Guideline on Sugar Intake for Adults and Children (2015) calls for reducing free sugars to less than 10 percent of total energy consumption—ideally below 5 percent—because excess free sugar contributes to weight gain and dental caries. Your decision to prohibit sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) on school premises is commendable and indeed critical to the implementation of this guidance. Consuming even one SSB brings children close to the recommended limit. Prohibiting SSBs on school premises also ensures that schools offer a healthy food environment for children. It sends a clear public-health signal that water and unsweetened drinks should be the default choice for children.

Likewise, it is commendable that the planned update of the decree ensures the content of salt in products provided in schools is fully consistent with recommendation to lower population salt intake to under 5 grams per day.¹ Removing ultra-processed dehydrated mixes like instant broth or soups that typically contain excessive sodium will help schools provide meals that support healthy blood pressure from an early age. Establishing healthy taste preferences is critical, as children's exposure to lower levels of salt, sugar, and fat during formative years shapes their long-term dietary habits and reduces the risk of chronic diseases.²³

¹ WHO global sodium benchmarks for different food categories. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

² Implementing school food and nutrition policies: a review of contextual factors. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

³ Tackling NCDs: best buys and other recommended interventions for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases, second edition. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2024. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

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We also applaud the planned regulation stronger emphasis on fruit, vegetables, legumes and whole-grain foods, together with the gradual reduction of red and especially processed meat. WHO and FAO statement states that high red and processed meat consumption is associated with negative health impacts;⁴ WHO/EURO as per the 2022-2030 programme therefore advises Member States to encourage a predominantly plant-based diet and to limit these products, both for cancer prevention and for the co-benefits of planetary health, as reflected in the WHO European Programme on Nutrition and Food Systems for Health 2022-2030.

By integrating these nutritional standards—removal of sugar-sweetened beverages, stringent control of high-salt processed products, and a shift towards plant-sourced menus—the amendment creates an enabling food environment that will foster healthy growth and cognitive development, narrow health inequities among socio-economically disadvantaged pupils, and reduce future pressure on the health-care system.

WHO stands ready to assist national and local stakeholders with technical advice, capacity-building and monitoring tools to ensure the successful roll-out and evaluation of the new standards. We commend the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Health for their leadership and urge the swift adoption and implementation of the decree.

Yours faithfully,

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WHO Representative to Czechia
Head of Country Office

Enclosures:

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⁴ What are healthy diets? Joint statement by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Health Organization. Geneva: World Health Organization and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; 2024. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd2223en>.