

**30 August 2012**

**SINGAPORE'S FIRST LET'S DRINK WATER CAMPAIGN ENCOURAGES CHILDREN AND TEENS TO CONSUME MORE WATER AND LESS SUGARY DRINKS**

*Surveys by the Health Promotion Board show an unhealthy proportion of Singapore children and teenagers consume sugary drinks frequently.*

**Singapore, 30 August 2012:** The latest Students' Health Survey in 2009 by the Health Promotion Board (HPB) revealed that 43 per cent of students in secondary schools, junior colleges and the centralised institute consumed sugary drinks daily.

2. The habit seems to be cultivated when they were younger, with another HPB survey conducted among parents and caregivers between 2008 and 2009 showing that 28 per cent provided sugary drinks more than once a week to their children between four and nine years old. This percentage increases to 34 per cent for children aged 10 years and above.

3. Research shows that the consumption of sugary drinks is associated with poor dietary choices and obesity in children – and these health issues follow them to adulthood. Limiting consumption of sugary drinks among local children and teenagers therefore has a substantial impact on Singapore's public health in the long run.

4. To urge school-going children and youths to replace sugary drinks with water, as well as drink enough to stay healthy and hydrated, HPB is launching Singapore's first Let's Drink Water Campaign. During the campaign, HPB will be working with pre-schools, primary schools, secondary schools and Post-secondary Education Institutions (PSEIs) to raise awareness of the importance of water consumption and encourage students to replace sugary drinks with water.

5. As part of the Let's Drink Water Campaign, HPB has helped pre-schools develop a lesson plan for teachers to encourage water drinking among children. In addition, under HPB's CHampioning Efforts Resulting in Improved School Health (CHERISH) framework, primary schools, secondary schools, junior colleges and the centralised institute are encouraged to make water coolers available around their premises.

6. Some new initiatives in pre-schools to educate students on the importance of reducing the intake of sugary beverages and drinking water instead include:

- Revising the criteria for certifying pre-schools as CHERISH Junior pre-schools to include the provision of adequate water breaks throughout the day, the provision of water as part of every balanced and healthy meal served at the school, and an enhanced curriculum to teach students the benefits of drinking water over sugary drinks
- Training pre-school Health Ambassadors to encourage their peers to drink water instead of sugary drinks as well as lead the class in singing the 'Sip to be Cool' water jingle
- Providing stickers for children's water bottles and posters around the school to encourage drinking water

7. Meanwhile, HPB is working with primary schools, secondary schools, junior colleges such as Wellington Primary School and Canberra Secondary School to encourage schools to initiate water breaks after lessons as well as put up posters to remind students to quench their thirst with water instead of sugary drinks. Stickers at places selling beverages will also be introduced at polytechnics and universities to drive home the point.

8. Beyond the school setting, HPB is also introducing a set of guidelines to help parents ensure their children drink enough water even as they cut down on sugary beverages. For instance, children between three and six years old are recommended to drink three to five glasses of water daily.

9. Said Associate Professor Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim, Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Transport: "One regular can of sugary drink contains about seven teaspoons of sugar. In contrast, water has zero calories. As lifelong dietary habits are formed at an early age, we need to pay more attention to what our children and teenagers are consuming when they are still young. HPB's Let's Drink Water Campaign goes back to the basics – drink water because it's good for our health."

10. Said Mr Ang Hak Seng, Chief Executive Officer, HPB: "Our surveys show that nearly half of local teenagers drink sugary drinks daily – possibly because sugary drinks have been a constant part of their diet as children. HPB aims to help children learn to do without a 'sugar fix' as early as possible, and is working with pre-schools to include, as part of the criteria to be a CHERISH Junior

pre-school, enough water breaks throughout the day, water as part of every balanced and healthy 'bento set' meal served at the pre-school, as well as lesson plans to teach children the benefits of drinking water over sugar-sweetened beverages.”

11. By 2015, HPB aims to have 500 pre-schools certified as CHERISH Junior pre-schools, where children will have regular water breaks, have water with every meal, and be taught the benefits of water over sugary drinks.

**Issued by Health Promotion Board**

## ANNEX 1 – Media Factsheet on Drink Water Campaign

### 1. Why is there a need to get the children and youth to consume water?

Studies show that local children and youth consume sugary drinks frequently.

- 28% of parents/caregivers with 4-9 years old children served/bought sugary drinks to their children at home or when eating out more than once a week.
- 34% of parents/caregivers with 10-17 years old children served/bought sugary drinks to their children at home or when eating out more than once a week.
- 43% of students in secondary schools, JCs and CI consumed sugary drinks daily.

Consumption of sugar is associated with obesity, dental caries and decreased intake of other nutrients.

One regular can of sugary drink contains about 7 teaspoons of sugar. It has been estimated that daily consumption of one sugary drink (120kcal) will produce a 50kg weight gain over 10 years<sup>1</sup>.

Moreover, since dietary habits are formed at an early age, even below the age of 5 years<sup>2</sup>, and are more difficult to change after the age of 11 to 18 years<sup>3</sup>, it is important to inculcate the habit of drinking water among the young.

### 2. What type of water is the best?

There is no significant difference between tap, bottled or filtered water in terms of meeting our nutritional needs. It is the amount we drink that really matters.

- Tap water (in Singapore) : Tap water in Singapore is chemically treated, filtered and disinfected raw water from various sources. Treatment frees the water of harmful bacteria, making it clear, sparkling, odourless, colourless, and safe for consumption.
- Mineral, artesian and spring water: These water come from underground water source. Mineral water should contain constant levels and relative proportions of minerals and trace elements at the source. In addition, no minerals should be added. Artesian water is water tapped through a well, while spring water is water that naturally flows to the surface collected at the spring or through a bore hole.
- Distilled or purified water: These water has been processed to remove minerals and other solids and impurities.
- Filtered water : This is water that has gone through one or a series of filters that is commonly attached to the kitchen sink. Some people choose to use water filter to improve the taste, smell and colour of tap water. However, Singapore's tap water is well within the World Health Organisation drinking water guidelines, and is suitable for drinking.

(Source: <http://www.hpb.gov.sg/HOPPortal/health-article/7446>)

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<sup>1</sup> Ebbeling CB, Pawlak DB, Ludwig DS. Childhood obesity: public-health crisis, common sense cure. *Lancet* 2002;360:473-482

<sup>2</sup> Skinner JD, Carruth BR, Wendy B, Ziegler PJ. Children's food preferences: longitudinal analysis. *J Am Diet Assoc* 2002;102:1638-47

<sup>3</sup> Kelder SH, Perry CL, Klepp KI, Lytle LL. Longitudinal tracking of adolescent smoking, physical activity, and food choice behaviors. *Am J Publ Health* 1994;84:1121-26

**3. What are the guidelines regarding the amount of water and fluid that a child and youth should drink a day?**

	Glasses <sup>#</sup> of water per day	Glasses <sup>#</sup> of total fluid intake per day*
1-2 yr	1-3	4-6
3-6 yr	3-5	5-7
7-12 yr	6-8	7-9
13-18 yr	8-10	9-12

<sup>#</sup> One glass = 250ml

\* Total fluid intake is the total amount of fluid intake from food (such as soup and porridge) and beverages (such as water and milk).

If the child is very active, ill (e.g. fever, diarrhea, vomiting) or the weather is warmer, his/her fluid requirements will be increased.

**4. How were the guidelines developed?**

The guidelines were developed based on a review of evidence and international recommendations such as recommendations from the Institute of Medicine<sup>4</sup>.

**5. What are some of the efforts at different educational institutions to support this campaign?**

a) Pre-Schools:

i. *Healthy School Policies*

- Healthy Meals in Childcare Centre Programme (HMCCP) – Childcare centres will need to serve water with lunch as part of the guidelines of this programme.
- Water & Eye Breaks - Teachers are encouraged to give their students water and eye breaks. Children will be asked to look at objects in a far distance to reduce the risk of developing myopia and drink water at the same time. Teachers will be encouraged to initiate these breaks after each lesson.
- Teachers to encourage parents that water bottles should be filled only with water.

ii. *Competencies for healthy living*

- Nutrition Ambassador – The pre-school nutrition health ambassadors will conduct a simple activity to show the amount of sugar found in sugary drinks to his/her classmates and to encourage his/her classmates to choose water instead of sugary drinks.
- Jingle - Pre-schoolers will be taught a jingle about drinking water that they can sing before water breaks.
- 'Drink Water' Lesson – The teacher will conduct the lesson to educate children on the importance of drinking water and to encourage them to choose water over sugary drinks.
- Educational Resources – Stickers with message to encourage water consumption will be given to the children to paste on their water bottles.

iii. *Physical Environment*

- Ambient messaging - Posters on drinking water will be placed around the school to remind the children to drink water.

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<sup>4</sup> Institute of Medicine (IOM). Dietary Reference Intakes for Water, Potassium, Sodium, Chloride, and Sulfate. Washington DC: National Academy Press, 2005.

b) Primary Schools:

- Water & Eye Breaks- Teachers are encouraged to give their students water and eye breaks. Children will be asked to look at objects in a far distance to reduce the risk of developing myopia and drink water at the same time. Teachers will be encouraged to initiate these breaks after each lesson.
- Ambient Messaging – Educational collaterals such as posters will be put up at strategic locations (e.g. near water coolers).

c) Secondary Schools & JCs:

- Water Breaks- Teachers are encouraged to give their students water breaks between lessons.
- Ambient Messaging– Educational collaterals such as posters will be put up at strategic locations (e.g. near water coolers).

d) ITEs, Polytechnics, Universities

- Table-top stickers that encourage youth to choose water over sugary drinks will be added to the current set of table-top stickers which encourage healthy eating in these educational institutes.

**6. How will schools be encouraged to promote water drinking under the CHERISH Award Assessment Criteria?**

Provision of water breaks, serving water with healthy meals and making water coolers available in schools are built into the CHERISH/CHERISH Junior Award Assessment Criteria.

a. CHERISH Junior Award Assessment Criteria:

- Pre-schools are encouraged to provide adequate water breaks throughout the day and ask parents' to fill their children's water bottles with water.
- Child care centres that are participating in the Healthy Meals in Child Care Centres Programme are required to serve water during lunch.

b. CHERISH Award Assessment Criteria:

- Primary schools, secondary schools and JCs/CI are encouraged to make water coolers available in their school canteens.

## **7. What support does HPB provide to parents to encourage their children to drink water?**

Pamphlets will be given to parents to inform them about the guidelines on water consumption and give them tips to help their children to drink water:

- Guidelines on water consumption for children
- Tips to help their children to drink water. Examples are
  - ✓ Make water easily available around the house.
  - ✓ Teach your child to help himself to water. Other drinks would have to be asked for.
  - ✓ If your child does not like the taste of plain water, try flavouring it with a squeeze of lemon or lime juice. This makes for a refreshing drink!
  - ✓ Bring your child shopping to pick out a favourite water bottle. It will be his new best friend, going wherever he goes! Fill your child's bottle with water only.
  - ✓ Praise your child when he chooses water over sugary drinks!
- How to implement a reward scheme at home to cultivate a habit of drinking water instead of sugary drinks in children

Parents are also provided with all the necessary resources to carry out the reward scheme. These include stickers, sticker book and tokens. Parents will paste a sticker in the sticker book whenever their children choose water over sugary drinks. When the sticker book is completed, the children can use it to exchange for a token from their teachers (spiral straw with message on water consumption).