



MEMO

Executive Summary:
Missouri Child Care Eat Smart Guidelines

The Missouri School Wellness Work Group, consisting of state and non-profit health organizations, partnered with the Missouri School Board Association to develop the Missouri Eat Smart Guidelines for Schools, now in its 2nd edition. Child care professionals felt similar guidelines were needed to assist and challenge child care facilities in planning nutritious menus and supporting a nutrition environment that promotes adoption of healthy behaviors in an effort to promote lifelong healthy weight among Missouri's children. The guidelines also encourage child care providers to plan menus that are consistent with the 2005 US Dietary Guidelines. Although not yet federal rule, recommendations have been made to revise the current United States Department of Agriculture child care meal patterns to better reflect the US Dietary Guidelines and the ever growing scientific evidence available about healthy meal patterns.

In an effort to assist Missouri child care facilities with meeting these anticipated demands, the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (MDHSS), Bureau of Community Food and Nutrition Assistance in coordination with the Missouri Council for Activity and Nutrition (MoCAN) established an interdisciplinary workgroup to create the Missouri Eat Smart Guidelines for Child Care (for children ages 2-12 years). The workgroup included representatives from the MDHSS, University of Missouri Extension Service, Missouri Head Start Collaboration Office and a non-profit child care center.

Eating nutritious foods and learning appropriate mealtime behaviors are important for children due to the rapid growth and major developmental changes occurring. Children in child care may receive between 50% and 75% of their daily calories while at the facility. Representing such a significant portion of total intake, the foods and the environment in which children eat these meals will have a big impact on future nutrition habits, thus increasing the responsibility of child care centers to provide nutritionally adequate and healthful food in a supportive environment.

The overarching dietary recommendations of the Missouri Eat Smart Guidelines challenge child care facilities to make nutrient-dense foods available and to embrace policies that support a healthy nutrition environment. Implementation of these guidelines would assist child care facilities in making improvements in their nutrition programs to better the health of the children they serve. In developing the guidelines, consideration was given to the vast differences in available resources between child care settings, from small in-home care to center-based care. The workgroup repeatedly came to the conclusion that since most children have the same basic nutrition requirements for growth and development and need for developing healthy habits, one set of guidelines was appropriate.

The guidelines make nutrition recommendations at three levels: minimum, intermediate and advanced. The standard for each level increases in healthfulness as the levels progress. Recommendations are included for breakfast, lunch and dinner menus, and snacks. The guidelines promote the best possible nutritional intake for children. In addition, environmental factors that relate to nutrition and meal delivery are addressed. These factors identify best practices supporting consistent nutrition messages to children, parents and facility staff while supporting development of healthy nutrition habits.

The guidelines are an effort to promote and protect the health and future of Missouri's children. It is the committee's hopes that child care facilities strive to provide healthier nutrition environments for our children.

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