

Kids' Meals: Restaurant Assessment in King County

Healthy Eating & Active Living (HEAL), Public Health—Seattle & King County

Jessica Jew, UW Nutritional Sciences Program, MPH-Nutrition Student and Dietetic Intern

Preceptor: Celeste Schoenthaler, MPH, HEAL manager



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INTRODUCTION

HEAL is interested in policy, systems, and environmental change in settings that influence children's health. Kids' meals policies may be a promising approach in restaurant environments to make it easier for children to eat more healthfully.

- On a typical day, 33% of children ages 2-11 ate at fast-food and 12% at full-service restaurants (NHANES 2007-08)
- For ages 2-6, 12% of total energy intake was from restaurants; for ages 7-12, 15% (NHANES 2003-06)
- Eating at restaurants is associated with ↑ sugar-sweetened beverages, ↓ milk & ↑ total fat, saturated fat, and sugar
- < 10% of kids' meals combinations at top national chains meet various nutrition criteria from experts or industry

OBJECTIVES

Kids' meals in King County restaurants were assessed to get a local snapshot and analyze characteristics that would be relevant for policy options, such as:

- Choice of beverages
- Healthfulness and food groups of meals, sides, entrees, desserts, and defaults
- Prices & marketing techniques

METHODS

Cities were chosen in south King County & Seattle. Sites were identified using Yelp to search for "kids' meals". # restaurants is the listings within 1 mile of the site plus a few additions from mapping. # kids' menus was identified largely with Yelp search.

SITE	# RESTAURANTS	# KIDS MENUS	%	# VISITED
Auburn North Shopping Center	63	11	17.5%	10
Kent Elementary	56	19	33.9%	17
Columbia City Link	41	5	12.2%	3
Tukwila Southcenter Mall	90	31	34.4%	22

52 restaurants were visited in total, but there were only 40 independent restaurant brands used for analysis.

During site visits, menus were collected or photographed and restaurant environment observed. Menus were analyzed according to the objectives.

CHAIN		CUISINE	
national chain	29 (72.5%)	American	23 (57.5%)
local chain	7 (17.5%)	Mexican	6 (15%)
non-chain	4 (10%)	Sandwich/soup	4 (10%)
TYPE		Asian	3 (7.5%)
sit-down	21 (52.5%)	Italian	2 (5%)
fast-food	10 (25%)	Pizza	2 (5%)
fast-casual	9 (22.5%)		

CONCLUSIONS

Results and discussed policy implications may indicate feasibility and reach of policy options. They can be taken under consideration for the stakeholder process and the policy design. HEAL can identify information gaps and plan for further assessment as well as monitoring & evaluation. Policy implications from the assessment are:

Restaurant type-

- Local implementation difficult because of chains
- Limited reach to diverse cuisines

Food & beverages-

- Healthy beverage policy may be an effective strategy
- Policy could encourage whole grains and fruit & vegetables prepared healthfully
- Healthier desserts are an opportunity for restaurants
- Healthier entrees may require a shift in demand or technical assistance to restaurants
- Healthier sides could be easier
- "Healthy default side" would have to be thoughtfully defined--regulating the whole meal may be more straightforward

Prices & marketing-

- Fairly affordable, as low as about \$3.20 in fast-food restaurants and closer to \$5-6 in sit-down
- Healthy options often priced about the same as unhealthy options but sometimes higher
- Toy ordinance would target a few brands only
- Kids LiveWell may have limited public recognition
- Strategies restaurants use could be adapted to help promote and market healthier kids' meals