

Nutrition Focus Newsletter

Free School Meals may reduce Childhood Obesity

Jess Kreuser RD, CD, Community Outreach Dietitian

Childhood obesity has been increasing over the past several decades. Obesity often continues into adulthood and is linked to a range of chronic health conditions and premature death.

Newly published research found that the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) was associated with a net reduction in the prevalence of childhood obesity.

The CEP is a federal policy that allows schools in high poverty areas to provide free breakfast and lunch to all attending students.

It was found that schools participating in the CEP had

a 2.4% relative reduction in obesity prevalence compared with eligible schools that did not participate. Although the findings are modest, even small improvements in obesity levels are noteworthy because effective strategies to reduce obesity at a population level remain elusive. Additionally, because obesity disproportionately affects racially and ethnically marginalized and low-income children, this policy could contribute to reducing health disparities.

The Community Eligibility Provision likely reduces obesity prevalence by substituting up to half of a child's weekly diet with healthier options and simultaneously freeing up more disposable income for low-to-middle-income families. Families receiving free breakfast and lunch save approximately \$4.70 per day per child, or \$850 per year. For low-income



families, particularly those with multiple school-age children, this could result in meaningful savings that families can use for other health-promoting goods or services.

Source: *The Conversation* under a Creative Commons license. <https://theconversation.com/free-school-meals-for-all-may-reduce-childhood-obesity-while-easing-financial-and-logistical-burdens-for-families-and-schools-223270>

