

PUBLIC
FOR FOOD & HEALTH POLICY
VOICE

PRESS RELEASE

1001 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.
Suite 522
Washington, D.C. 20036
202 659-5930

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 11, 1991

Contact: Jodie Silverman

Patty Morris, 202-659-5930

**NATION'S SCHOOL CHILDREN HEADED FOR A HEALTH CRISIS:
PUBLIC VOICE REPORTS TROUBLING FINDINGS ON
CHILDREN'S EATING PATTERNS**

WASHINGTON -- Children are consuming alarmingly high levels of fat, saturated fat and cholesterol and too little fiber, while their nutrient intake from the National School Lunch Program is even worse than average intakes, according to a study released today by Public Voice for Food and Health Policy.

The report, "Heading for a Health Crisis: Eating Patterns of America's School Children" also found that the diets of the poorest children combine too much fat with too few calories and inadequate intakes of vitamin A, calcium and iron, nutrients which are essential for physical growth and mental development. The study represents the first documentation of this kind on a national level in nearly a decade.

"Without question, we are headed for a major health crisis in this nation if America's kids continue on such a destructive eating course," said Ellen Haas, Executive Director of Public Voice for Food and Health Policy.

"With diets high in saturated fat and low in essential nutrients, today's kids face a future of chronic disease and impaired physical and mental development," Haas said.

The study examined the nutritional adequacy of the diets of children between the ages of six and eleven and the differences in nutrient intakes for children of all income brackets. The study also assessed the nutritional adequacy of meals eaten by children in the National School Lunch Program. Intakes of fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, carbohydrates, iron, vitamin C, calcium and a host of other nutrients were examined.

Major findings include:

- o Roughly nine out of ten school age children of all income brackets consume too much fat, saturated fat and cholesterol;

- o Not only are the nation's poorest school age children (living in households at or below 50 percent of poverty) consuming

too much fat, saturated fat and cholesterol, but one out of every three does not get enough to eat and many do not get even two-thirds of the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA's) of iron, vitamin A and calcium;

o Children's nutrient intake from the National School Lunch Program is higher in fat, saturated fat and sodium and lower in carbohydrates than both the national average intake and the recommended levels according to the 1990 U.S. Dietary Guidelines.

"Unless this startling trend of nutritionally deficient diets is turned around quickly, we very likely will sacrifice the health of an entire generation," Haas said.

Key Recommendations of the report include:

o The U.S. Surgeon General should develop an aggressive children's nutrition campaign, similar to its anti-smoking campaign to reduce the dangerously high intakes of fat, saturated fat and cholesterol in the diets of American school children;

o Congress should mandate disclosure of nutrition information including fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, fiber, sodium and sugar for all meals in federally subsidized children's meal programs, especially the National School Lunch program, as a condition for cost reimbursement;

o Congress should mandate that all federally subsidized children's meal programs, particularly the National School Lunch Program, conform to the U.S. Dietary Guidelines of containing no more than 30 percent of calories from fat and no more than 10 percent of calories from saturated fat;

o The nutrition and health status of our nation's children should be monitored on a timely and regular basis. In addition, our nation's poorest children (those living in households at or below 50 percent of poverty) should be designated as a nutritionally vulnerable group and monitored regularly;

o Congress should mandate that FTC require nutrition and health claims in food advertising, especially ads directed toward children, be consistent with claims in food labeling.

Though a Government Accounting Office (GAO) study concludes that USDA's consumption data for 1987-88 "may not be representative of the U.S. population because of the low response rate", GAO did not recommend not using the data, but rather to exercise caution when using the data to draw conclusions about national consumer behavior. (A fact sheet is attached which explains this in further detail).

Public Voice for Food and Health Policy is a national consumer advocacy organization that works for a more nutritious, safe and affordable food supply.