



Preliminary results from Kai Time in ECE

An online questionnaire was completed by a representative from 257 Early Childhood Education (ECE) services in May - July 2014. This number represents 30% of licensed ECE services in Auckland, Counties Manukau and Waikato District Health Board areas. A diverse range of ECE services took part in this research.

Food provided by ECE services

- 56% provide some food to children daily.
- 64% of private education and care centres (ECC) and 37% of community ECC provide lunch daily.
- Two-thirds of private ECC (65%) and community ECC (62%) employ a cook to prepare the food. Teachers prepare the food in most kindergartens (82%), and playcentres only use parents to prepare food when it is provided by them.

Nutrition education

- 60% teach food and nutrition concepts at least weekly, e.g. how vegetables are grown or foods eaten by different cultures, or how fruit and vegetables keep bodies healthy.
- 59% involve children in making, baking or cooking food at least weekly. Cupcakes, cake or biscuits (79%) and muffins (73%) were the most common foods baked with children in the past 12 months.
- 90% grow their own fruit trees and/or vegetables onsite. Children were involved in gardening activities: daily (18%), weekly (43%), monthly (25%) or a few times a year/rarely (16%).

Special occasions

- Birthdays were the most common special occasion (47%). Also common, were national or cultural celebrations, such as Easter, Diwali, Mothers' Day (22%) and last days or farewells (13%).
- 41% have a special occasion 'monthly (but not every week)', 46% 'a few times a year' (but not every month), 7% 'weekly' (but not every day).
- The most common food served on special occasions was cupcakes or a cake (83%). Other foods served were: biscuits (26%), pizza, pies, sausages or sausage rolls (25%), sandwiches, filled rolls or sushi (25%), confectionery (14%), potato chips (18%), sweet/fried bread or pancakes (5%), 100% fruit juice (5%) and sugar-sweetened beverages (3%). 49% usually serve fruit or vegetables on special occasions.

Food from home

- 47% require children to bring food from home daily for meals and/or snacks.
- 95% require food to be brought from home for some, most or all special occasions.
- 66% have written nutrition guidelines for food brought from home, (68% of services where children bring food daily for all of their snacks and meals).
- 73% of services with written nutrition guidelines said 'most' of their families complied with the policy, and 18% said 'all' their families complied.

Kai time: Staff behaviours

- 80% 'always' sit with children while they eat.
- 87% 'most of the time' or 'always' talk to children about what they are eating.
- 85% 'never' or 'rarely' hurry children to finish eating.
- 84% 'always' encourage and promote water consumption.
- 27% 'most of the time' or 'always' eat and drink the same things as children.

Fundraising with food

- 37% had sold food as part of their fundraising activities in the past 12 months.
- Pizza, pies, sausages or sausage rolls were the most common foods for fundraising (54%), followed by cupcakes, cake, croissants or biscuits (49%).
- 24% of those services who sell food to fundraise (9% of all ECE services) had sold lollies, sweets, chocolate or other confectionery in the past 12 months.
- Cultural foods, such as hangi, chop suey, samosas, sushi and Indian curries, were also relatively common (21%).

Physical activity and sedentary behaviour

- ECE services generally employ a wide range of physical activity strategies, space and equipment to encourage active play.
- 87% have enough indoor play space for some active play (e.g. jumping and dancing) and 11% reported enough indoor space for all activities including running.
- Most children spend the majority of their time at ECE services in active play (either child or teacher led play). In 87% of services, teachers lead children in some active play during the day.
- One in nine services reported that children on average watch television, educational programmes or movies daily (2%) or weekly (9%) while in ECE. One in three services reported that children use computers (games and apps) on average daily (11%) or weekly (22%) while in ECE.

Barriers and enablers to support healthy behaviours

- 40% experience a barrier to providing and/or promoting healthy food to children. The most common barrier was a lack of support from parents and families (52%), followed by concerns about food intolerances or allergies (26%).
- 29% experience a barrier to promoting physical activity to children. The most common barriers were 'limited opportunity/space' (34%), 'limited storage' (34%) and 'insufficient funds' (30%).
- 50% had a 'nutrition champion' and 50% had a 'physical activity champion' (someone who shares knowledge and skills, raises awareness and promotes positive change regarding food and nutrition/physical activity for children).
- 38% did not have either a 'nutrition champion' or a 'physical activity champion', and 39% had both a 'nutrition champion' and a 'physical activity champion'.

What else will come from this research?

Look out for further research using the Kai Time in ECE data, on:

- Quality of food provided by ECE services (menu analysis) and average spend on food per child per day;
- The content of written nutrition and physical activity policies;
- Participation in health promotion programmes, such as 5+ A Day and the Heart Foundation's Healthy Heart Awards;
- Differences in results by ECE service type, neighbourhood deprivation, and other variables of interest;
- A summary score for nutrition and physical activity environment indicators that may be linked to child growth;
- Health outcomes for children in ECE environments, accounting for the home environment by linking to the *Growing Up in New Zealand* study which has followed nearly 7,000 children from before birth until now when they are 5 years old.

About Kai Time in ECE

Kai time in ECE was a one-off online survey of managers, head teachers and supervisors of licensed daycare centres, kindergartens, playcentres, kohanga, Pacific language centres and crèches in the Auckland, Counties Manukau and Waikato District Health Board (DHB) regions. The survey collected information about food, nutrition and physical activity practices and policies for 3-4 year olds and was in the field from 1 May - 31 July 2014.

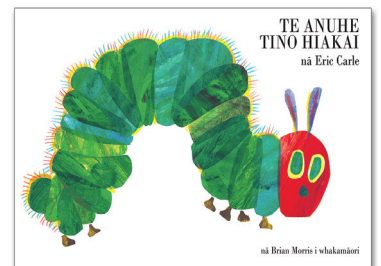
Why is this research needed?

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is an increasingly important area of young children's lives; New Zealand children start ECE services at an earlier age, and attend for more hours per day, than ever before.

The ECE environment has the potential to influence a child's diet, food preferences, eating behaviours and physical activity for a lifetime, and we know that there are currently some great initiatives in ECE services to support children's health and wellbeing. However, the last survey on New Zealand's ECE food and nutrition environment was done five years ago and that study was unable to link what is happening in ECE services with child health outcomes. This kind of research exploring the association between children's health and their ECE environment has never been done before in New Zealand.

Kai Time in ECE updates our knowledge on the environments where New Zealand children increasingly play, learn and grow.

More findings from the Kai Time in ECE survey will be released on our website: www.growingup.co.nz/kai-time



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