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Study Shows a Little Money Buys a Lot of Calories at City Corner Stores

Fifty-three percent of kids surveyed visited a corner store daily, five days per week; Chips and candy top the list of items purchased, but efforts are being made to increase healthy options

Philadelphia, PA, October 12, 2009 – Children in Philadelphia who attended public schools and shopped at corner stores before or after school purchased almost 360 calories of foods and beverages per visit, according to new research published in *Pediatrics*. Chips, candy and sugar-sweetened beverages were the most frequently purchased items. This is the first study to document both what foods and beverages children purchased in local corner stores on their way to and from school, and the nutritional content of those items.

Lead researcher Kelley Borradaile, Ph.D., from the Center for Obesity Research and Education at Temple University and colleagues from The Food Trust conducted over 800 surveys of students in grades 4 to 6 outside of 24 corner stores in Philadelphia. Research staff interviewed children about their purchases immediately after they were made, and also recorded the type, weight and size of each item purchased to collect nutritional information. Children in the study were from one of 10 urban K-8 schools, and over 80 percent of the students enrolled in the schools qualified for free or reduced-price meals. Other key findings from the study include:

- Over 53 percent of students reported shopping at corner stores once daily, five days per week.
- Almost 29 percent of the students surveyed shopped at corner stores both before and after school, five days per week.
- On average, children spent a little over a dollar to purchase 356 calories of snack food and/or drinks during each visit. With just a dollar, children could buy an 8oz beverage, a single serving bag of chips, an assortment of candy and gum, and a popsicle.
- Chips were the most frequently purchased item, accounting for about 34 percent of all items purchased, followed by candy, sugar-sweetened beverages and gum.

“This is the first study to show what children purchase from corner stores before and after school,” said Borradaile. “It is troubling that so little money buys so many calories. Corner stores are an important part of the urban landscape, and they have a significant impact on the amount and quality of calories children consume.”

Because corner stores are often prevalent in lower-income communities where children are at the highest risk for childhood obesity, Borradaile and colleagues stress the opportunity these stores offer to increase the availability of healthy food in communities.

Temple University is evaluating The Food Trust's efforts to improve access to affordable, healthy foods in corner stores. Borradaile's study provides baseline data for an ongoing two-year study of the program's effects on children's purchases.

"Promoting items like water, single-serving snacks and fresh fruits are small changes that could yield a significant impact on the quantity and quality of children's food intake," said Sandy Sherman, Ed.D, director of nutrition education at The Food Trust.

The study, "Snacking in Children: The Role of Urban Corner Stores," was supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through its national program Healthy Eating Research. This study is part of a larger national effort, the Healthy Corner Store Initiative, to help store owners in Philadelphia, Baltimore and Oakland, Calif., stock fresh fruit and other healthy snacks.

Other researchers on this study are Sandy Sherman, Brianna Sandoval and Allison Karpyn, from The Food Trust; Stephanie S. Vander Veur, Tara McCoy and Gary D. Foster, from Temple University; and Joan Nachmani, from the Philadelphia School District.

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About Healthy Eating Research

Healthy Eating Research is a \$16 million national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The program supports research on environmental and policy strategies to promote healthy eating among children to prevent childhood obesity, especially among the low-income and racial and ethnic populations at highest risk for obesity. For more information, visit www.healthyeatingresearch.org.

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