



Guide to vending in the Health Services

DECEMBER 2021



Seirbhís Sláinte | Building a
Níos Fearr | Better Health
á Forbairt | Service

Contents

Introduction.....	2
What has changed?.....	3
1. Removing Sugar Sweetened Drinks	3
2. Increasing the amount of still water in machines.....	3
3. Calorie Cap on snacks	3
Procurement and Site Management	4
Frequently Asked Questions	4
Contact information.....	6
References.....	7

Introduction

In the past two decades, levels of overweight and obesity in Ireland have doubled creating a significant challenge for our country. Overweight and obesity are significant risk factors for many chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancers, type 2 diabetes and respiratory problems. The [Healthy Ireland \(HI\) Framework](#) sets out a comprehensive and co-ordinated plan to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Ireland over the coming years. '[Healthy Ireland in the Health Services](#)' 2015-2017 sets out how the HSE is implementing the Healthy Ireland Framework within the health services in Ireland. To support the HSE to reduce the burden of chronic disease a number of actions are being implemented including the implementation of the [Healthier Vending Policy \(Revision 1 2015\)](#).

The Health Service Executive (HSE) Healthier Vending Policy was introduced in 2014 (revised in 2015) with the objective of contributing to a healthier food environment across the health service by ensuring that staff, visitors and patients have the option of choosing a healthier snack or beverage when using a vending machine on HSE premises. The Healthy Eating Active Living Programme commissioned the National Nutrition Surveillance Centre, UCD, to undertake an analysis of data for 2016 from the two vending companies on contract to the Health Services. The policy was reviewed by the Healthier Food Environment Advisory Group in 2018. The review was informed by the [UCD analysis](#), and the 2014 policy was replaced by the HSE Vending Policy in 2019.

The [HSE Vending Policy 2019](#) applies to vending machines for cold soft drinks, confectionery and snacks on HSE premises and premises of organisations that are funded by the HSE. Confectionery and snack vending machines provide easy access to sugar-sweetened beverages, confectionery and snacks that have a long shelf-life and little nutritional value. In general, snack products are high in fat, sugar and salt and are linked to an increased risk and incidence of chronic diseases as well as contributing to high levels of obesity. Vending machines can sometimes be the sole source of food or drinks available after hours in health service settings when other catering facilities are closed.

Under the HSE Vending Policy 2019 sugar sweetened beverages are not stocked in vending machines and there is a cap of 200 calories on most snack products. It is hoped that these changes will send a strong message to staff, visitor and patients regarding the commitment of the HSE to improve the food environment within the organisation.

This guide is part of a toolkit prepared by the Healthy Eating Active Living Programme. It offers health service managers and staff involved in the vending process, guidance and advice on how to comply with the policy. It provides information to help in understanding the reasons for the new requirements in the 2019 revised policy and other additional information in relation to vending. An [audit tool and protocol](#) are also available to staff as part of this toolkit.

What has changed?

1. Removing Sugar Sweetened Drinks

A growing body of research indicates that an increase in the consumption of sugar sweetened beverages is associated with increases in calorie intake, weight gain, type 2 diabetes, obesity and dental caries. The consumption of sugar sweetened beverages may influence the development of obesity in children, adolescents and adults. In May 2018, the Irish Government introduced a Sugar Tax on Sugar Sweetened Beverages in a step to reduce their consumption because of the proven negative impact on weight and dental health. By removing sugar sweetened beverages and by increasing the availability of water from vending machines, health can be supported while still providing a range of popular drinks.

2. Increasing the amount of still water in machines

60% of beverages are required to be still water in beverage only machines and 50% are required to be still water in beverage and snack “combination” machines. The remaining beverages will be non-sugar sweetened beverages e.g. diet drinks, juices, flavoured waters, carbonated waters. We recommend choosing still water as it has no calories and contains no sugars that can damage teeth. Diet soft drinks have been linked with overeating and weight gain as some studies identify that “consumers of diet drinks might consume more high energy snacks”. Also the caffeine and acid content of artificially sweetened soft drinks can have similar health consequences to regular soft drinks such as dental erosion and bone demineralisation.

3. Calorie cap on snacks

Snacks containing more than 200kcal per packet will not be stocked in vending machines, with the exemption of the following three product types - packets of nuts or seeds that are plain and unsalted, dried fruit, or packets containing some or all of these products. The calorie limit in the 2014 policy was 250 calories. 60% of snacks (excluding the three exempted products) in machines will contain less than 150 calories per packet.

By placing a 200kcal limit on items in vending machines in this policy, some larger size confectionary and snack products previously sold will not now be sold. It is anticipated that the maximum calorie limit on products will encourage food manufacturers to reformulate products and produce smaller size packs. This helps to send a clear message about the importance of smaller portion sizes.

Procurement and Site Management

The implementation of the 2015 Healthier Vending Policy is supported by a national procurement framework known as the Health Service Executive (HSE) National Contract for Vending 2015-2020. Two companies in Ireland are contracted to provide the contents for vending machines in the health services. Ninety percent of health service sites have contracted one of these companies and the site level contracts are the responsibility of local management. The HSE National Contract for Vending 2015-2020 has been extended for two years due to COVID pressures and will be renewed in February 2022 under the remit of the Office of Government Procurement (OGP).

The exception to the above is in situations where there are pre-existing contracts which are being honoured (the 2015 policy allowed for a transition period) or where areas choose to fill machines themselves. In these situations, sites are still required to comply with the policy.

See the Protocol for Vending in the Health Service for more detailed information on implementation, monitoring and audit of the policy.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Who needs to comply with the Healthier Vending Policy?

The Healthier Vending Policy applies to all health service sites including HSE sites and agencies and hospitals funded by the HSE through Section 38 and Section 39.

The HSE Health Business Services strategy was adopted in February 2014 and is currently being implemented. A key component of this strategy is 'one voice for health sector procurement'. In accordance with the Government Decision of 23rd April 2013, all agencies funded via the HSE are required to collaborate regarding procurement, delivering 'one voice for health sector procurement'.

Agencies and hospitals that are funded by the HSE through Section 38, Section 39 and For-Profit are required to comply with all the legal, regulatory and professional responsibilities with regards to regulations, codes of practice, standards and quality assurance requirements in the delivery of the services

2. What about nursing homes? Are they obliged to comply with the HSE Healthier Vending Policy?

HSE nursing homes are obliged to comply with the policy. Private nursing homes are not obliged to comply.

3. Don't the items sold in HSE vending machines still contain lots of fat and sugar?

By its very nature, it is challenging to provide healthier vending with machines that are designed to

vend confectionary products that are high in fat, salt and sugar. Confectionary machines account for the majority of vending machines in the Irish health services. Confectionary vending machines are not intended to be a regular source of snacks for staff, visitors or patients but may be the sole source of food or drinks available when other catering facilities are closed. By making the changes in the 2019 policy we are hoping to reduce the amount of products sold that are high in fat, salt and sugar.

Healthier vending is less challenging when using refrigerated vending machines that stock produce such as fruit, milk and sandwiches, although these machines pose their own set of operational challenges. These are not currently widely used in Irish health service facilities.

4. What if I want to buy a sugar sweetened drink or large confectionary snacks?

The HSE recognises that the removal of sugar sweetened beverages may reduce choice for consumers. However, the HSE believes that the overall benefit of achieving a significant reduction in the sales of sugar sweetened beverages and high calorie snacks outweighs the possible narrowing of choice. People have the option to purchase and bring sugar sweetened drinks and high calorie snacks into HSE sites if they so wish. They will not be available to purchase in HSE vending machines.

5. Aren't fruit juices full of sugar, why are they still in vending machines?

Fruits and fruit juices contain fruit sugar, but this type of sugar is somewhat different from the sugar added to biscuits, bars, sweets and pastries. Added sugar lacks the multiple health-promoting qualities of fruits. Because fruit juices contain less fibre than whole fruit, the advice is to limit fruit juice to once a day with a meal and always choose unsweetened. Juices "from concentrate" are nutritionally similar to fresh juices.

6. Are artificial sweeteners safe?

All low calorie sweeteners used in food and drinks sold in the EU have to undergo rigorous safety testing before being approved by the European Commission. More information about artificial sweeteners can be found from the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA).

7. What about people with diabetes?

Some people with diabetes, especially if they are taking insulin or certain medications to control their blood glucose, can experience low blood glucose (hypoglycemia), particularly if they miss a meal or have extra activity. Hypoglycaemia should be treated by taking a sugary food or drink as quickly as possible (Diabetes Ireland, 2017). People at risk of hypoglycemia are advised to carry glucose tablets with them. Fruit juices can also be used as an alternative to treat hypoglycemia.

Contact information

Healthy Eating Active Living Programme

2nd Floor, Block D, Parkgate Business Centre, Dublin D08 YFF1

Tel: 01-6352492

Email: healthyeating.activeliving@hse.ie

Website:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/our-priority-programmes/heal/healthier-vending/>

For procurement advice and information, please contact:

HSE Procurement

Email: hcs.info@hse.ie

Website: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthbusinessservices/procurement/>

References

Department of Health (2013) Healthy Ireland: A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025, available at: <http://health.gov.ie/blog/publications/healthy-ireland-a-framework-for-improved-health-and-wellbeing-2013-2025/>

HSE 'Healthy Ireland in the Health Services' National implementation Plan 2015-2017 available at: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/healthy-ireland/hidocs/hiimplementationplanweb.pdf>

HSE Healthier Vending Policy (2014). Available at:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/our-priority-programmes/healthier-vending/>

HSE Vending Policy (2019). Available at:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/our-priority-programmes/healthier-vending/>