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National Institute
for Public Health
and the Environment

**Environmental factors related to
diet, physical activity and
overweight in secondary schools.**

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Content of presentation

- Research objective
- Background
- Methods
- Results
- Conclusion
- Recommendations

Research objective

- To monitor the national situation of the prevention of overweight at secondary schools
- In order of the Inspectorate of Public health
- Our research-team:
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Msc. Mr. G. Buijs

Background

- Overweight is an increasing health problem. 1 out of six children is overweight.
- Possible causes: nutrition, physical activity, imbalance
- Related health consequences: cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer
- Since children spent a significant time at school, the environment of the school can have an important influence on daily food intake and physical activity of their students.

Methods

- **How??**

Questionnaire among all secondary schools (n=1250)/ respons 56%

4 main topics:

6. The environment of the school
7. the attention for nutrition, physical activity and overweight during classes
8. the attention for nutrition, physical activity and overweight in additional projects.
9. policies and measurements to enable healthy nutrition, more physical activity and the prevention of overweight.



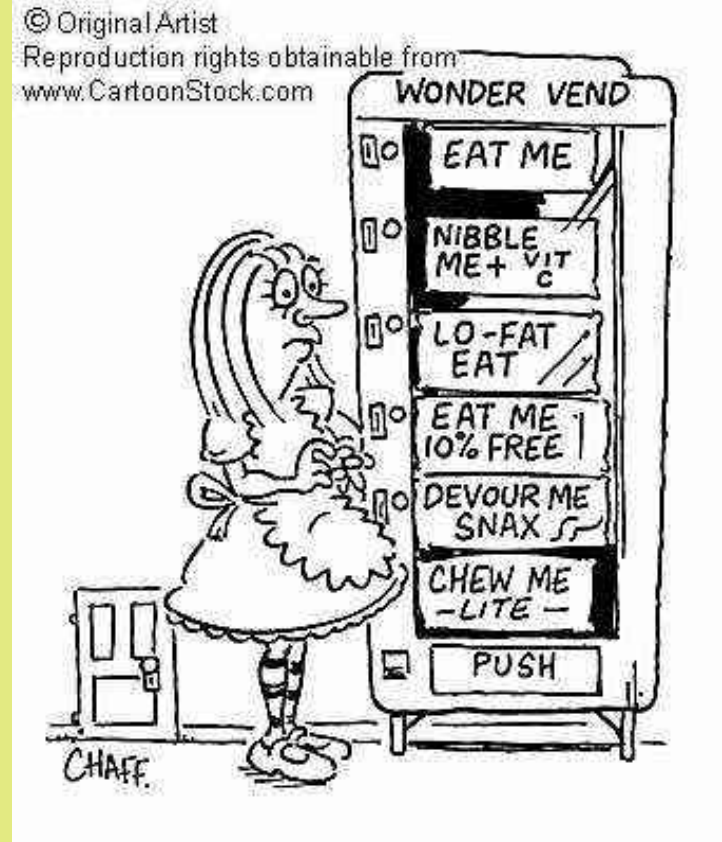
The environment of the school

- An unhealthy school environment can contribute to bad eating habits, lack of exercise and eventually overweight.
- The questionnaire measured the following environmental factors:
 - food offered at school/around school
 - possibilities physical activity/access to green space
 - transportation and traffic safety

Results: food environment

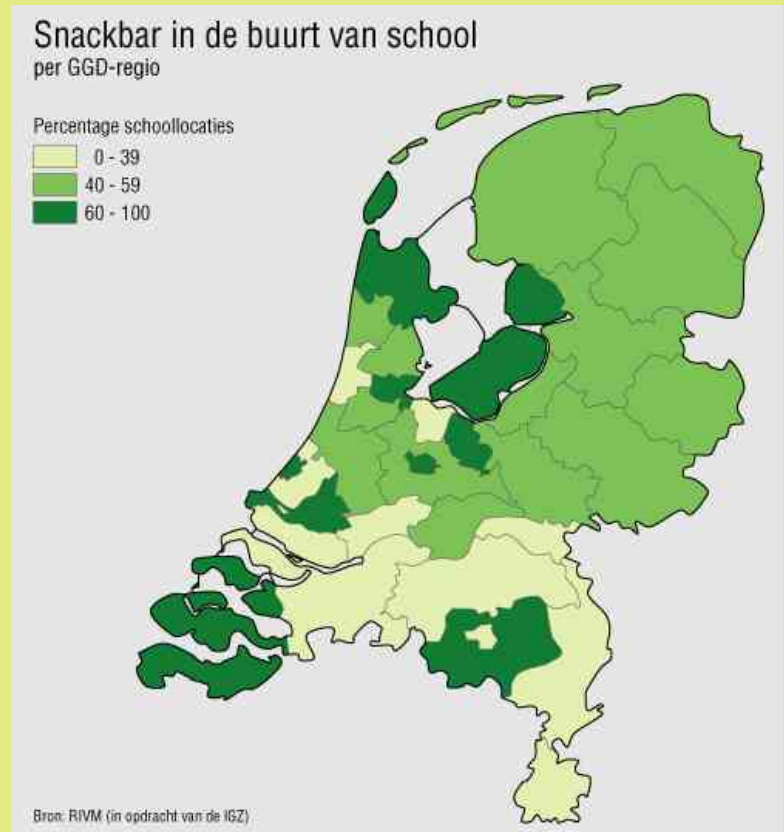
- **In school**

- 87% soda machine, 77% snack machine, 88% canteen, 10% water-cooler/healthy snack machine
- With respect to the content; 60% more unhealthy



Results: food environment

- **Around school:**
 - 75% of the schools has at least one food facility in the direct neighborhood of the school

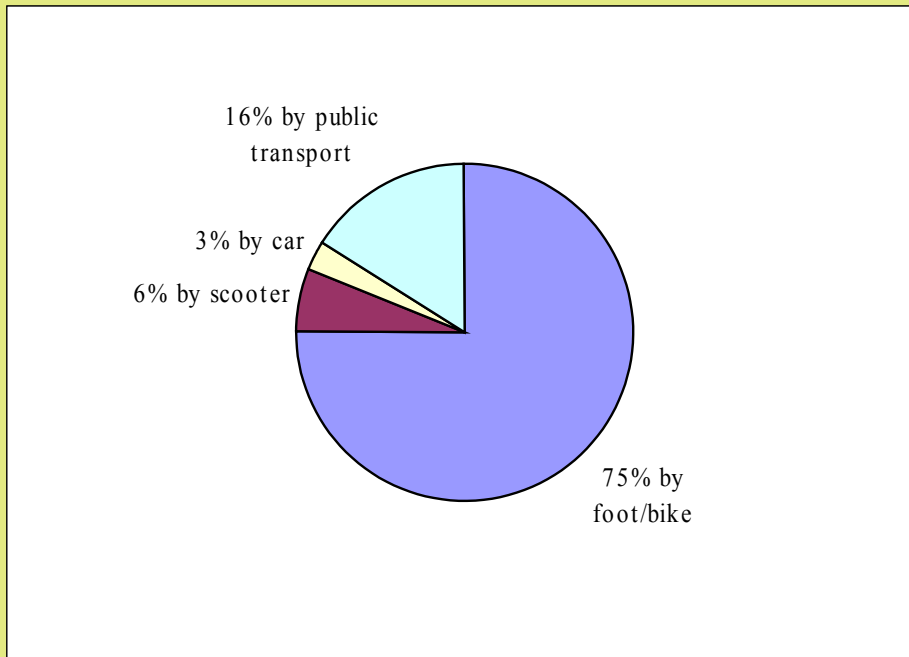


Results: possibilities for physical activity

- At 8 out of 10 schools it is possible to walk
- 40% offer extra sport facilities at the schoolyard
- Facilities for sport/green spaces in neighborhood:
 - 25% park/green space
 - 20% sports field
 - 15% soccer field



Results: transportation and traffic safety



- The major part of the students go to school by foot/bike
- 89% of the schools evaluate the traffic safety as good

Results

- 45% of the schools have a health policy, 17% have a specific policy for overweight
- 48% of the schools feel responsible for the prevention of overweight
- 59% expect to give more attention to the topic in the near future

Conclusion

- The food environment of most schools can be described as unhealthy
- The environment of most the school seems to offer sufficient possibilities for physical activities
- The results identify keys of action for improvement of the school environment

Recommendations: how to improve the school-environment?

- Develop an integrated multisectoral approach and policy: child is part of the environment, involve different sectors: local authorities, schools, community, parents.
- A more balanced food selection at school; educate children about healthy eating habits.
- Encourage children to make use of the available possibilities for physical activity

Thank you for your attention

More interest in this topic?

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