

## Rationale

A healthy active lifestyle involves both physical activity and healthy eating, however sometimes the ability to make healthy choices is hampered by the limited availability of appropriate choices. It may be thought that hospitals and leisure centres would be role models for healthy environments but often the vending provision and cafes in these settings provide little opportunity to exercise a healthy choice.

A 'mystery shopping' survey of hospital food in 2005 found that although healthy choices were available in hospital restaurants, more often than not the vending provision gave very limited or no opportunity to make a healthy choice.

Due to the introduction of standards for school food and food other than lunch there have been many changes to food provision in schools. Healthier vending has been successfully introduced into many schools or vending has been removed altogether, however, these changes have not necessarily been translated across to sports and leisure centres although in many cases they are co-located in schools. Schools, sport and leisure centres are widely used by children and young people, and their families. It is therefore important that the healthy eating messages given in schools are reflected in settings such as sport and leisure centres.

Tackling obesity is a priority for primary care trusts and local authorities and a range of programmes involving both food and physical activity are being developed across the region, some based within leisure centres. However, the food choices in these settings have not been assessed. A snap shot survey of current vending situation in leisure and sport centres – with a particular focus on those attached to secondary schools - has been undertaken by the Department of Health West Midlands. The results of the survey will be used to make a case to sport and leisure centres to examine their vending practice.

## Aim

To assess food and drink choices in sports and leisure centres across the West Midlands.

## Methodology

In January 2008, a postal survey (see appendix 1) was sent to 418 leisure and sport centres in the West Midlands region. These were a mixture of local authority sport and leisure centres some of which were school-based. It also included specific sport facilities such as swimming pools and sports halls that were used for public sport. The survey was

anonymous and respondents did not need to identify their centres unless they chose to receive the results of the survey or be entered into a prize draw. The survey was re-sent in February to increase the response rate.



## Definitions

The following definitions of healthy snacks/drinks were used in line with nutritional standards for school food

**A healthy drink includes** – water – plain or sparkling, 100% fruit/vegetable juice or diluted fruit juices, milk/yoghurt drinks with less than 5% added sugar .

**The following do not count – flavoured waters, fizzy carbonated drinks, sports drinks.**

**Healthy food/snacks include:** dried fruit, fruit pots, yoghurts, sandwiches made with wholemeal/whole grain bread, fresh fruit and vegetables, nuts and seeds with no added salt or sugar. **The following do not count – cereal bars, crisps, sweets, flapjacks.**

# Results

## Response Rate

Local Authority	Number of Leisure Centres	Response rate after 1 <sup>st</sup> mail shot	Response Rate after 2 <sup>nd</sup> mail shot
Birmingham	78	15% (12)	15% (12)
Coventry	37	16% (6)	24% (9)
Dudley	24	8% (2)	17% (4)
Herefordshire	18	28% (5)	44% (8)
Sandwell	23	17% (4)	30% (7)
Shropshire	28	0% (0)	25% (7)
Solihull	15	27% (4)	27% (4)
Staffordshire	36	31% (11)	36% (13)
Stoke on Trent	26	23% (6)	35% (9)
Telford and Wrekin	16	13% (2)	31% (5)
Walsall	2	19% (5)	23% (6)
Warwickshire	27	22% (6)	22% (6)
Wolverhampton	26	4% (1)	12% (3)
Worcestershire	38	21% (8)	29% (11)
<b>Total</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>17% (72)</b>	<b>25% (104)</b>

Figure 1: Response Rate

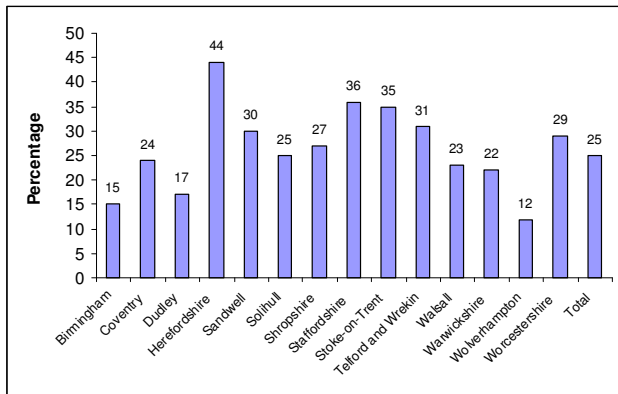


Figure 3: Type of Vending Machines in Leisure Centres

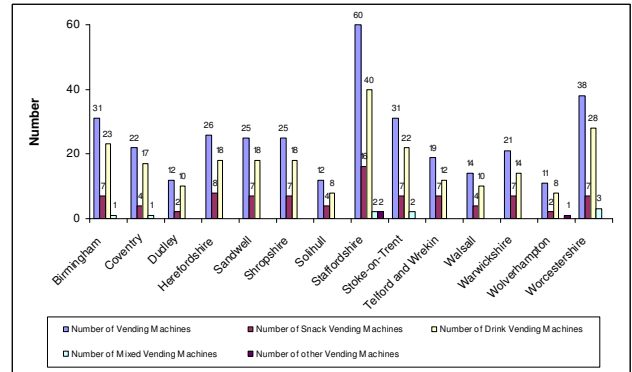


Figure 2: Number of Vending Machines

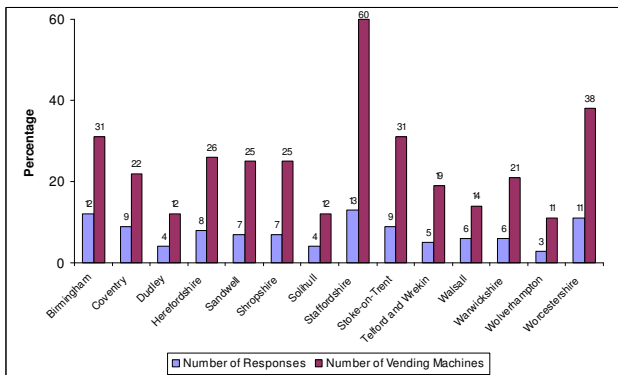
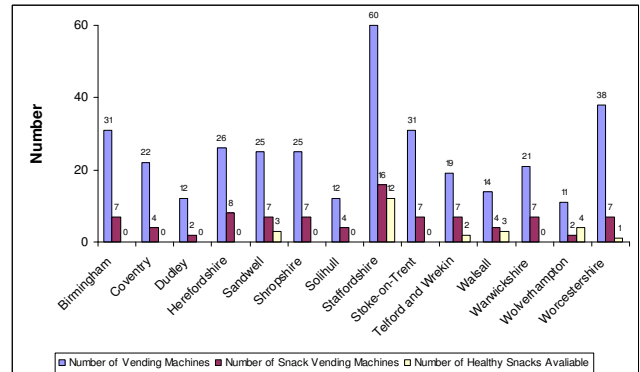
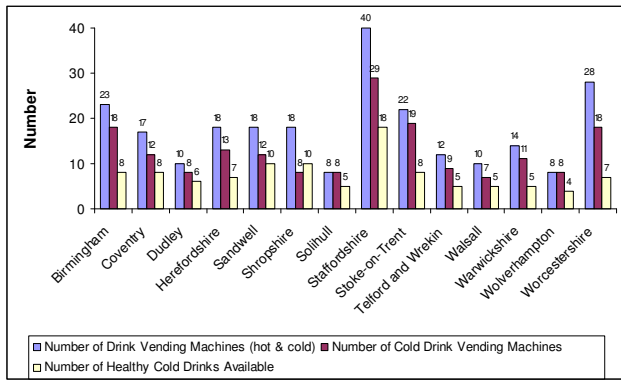


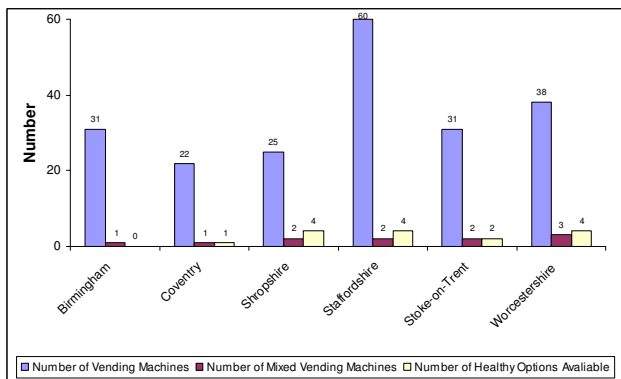
Figure 4: Snack Vending Machines



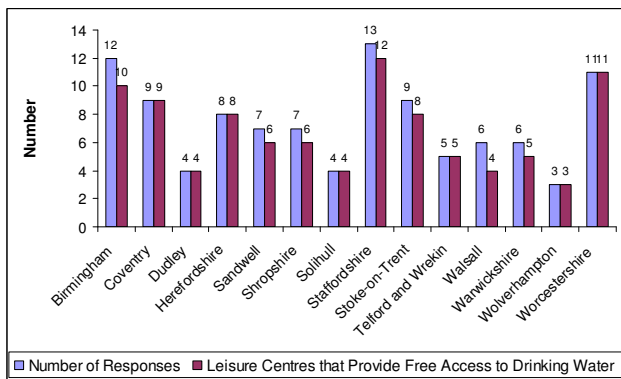
**Figure 5: Drinks Vending Machines**



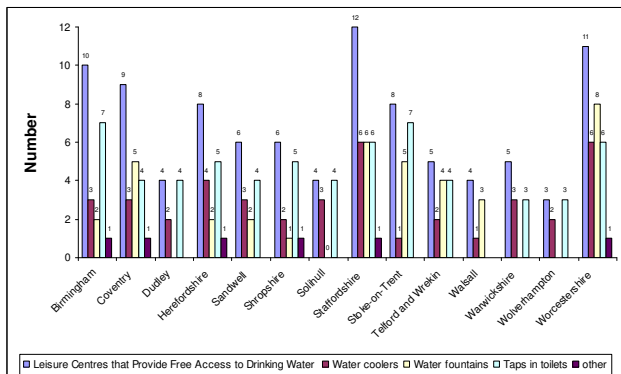
**Figure 6: Mixed Vending Machines**



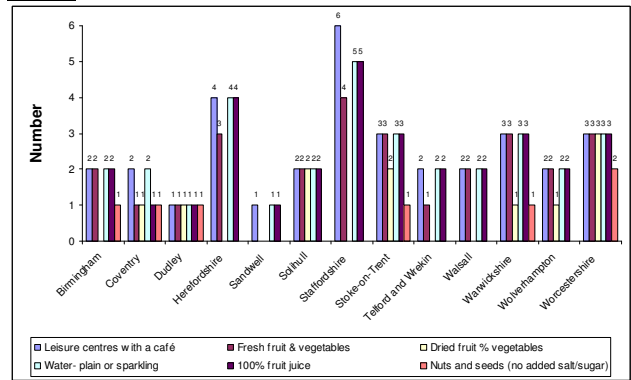
**Figure 7: Access to Free Drinking Water**



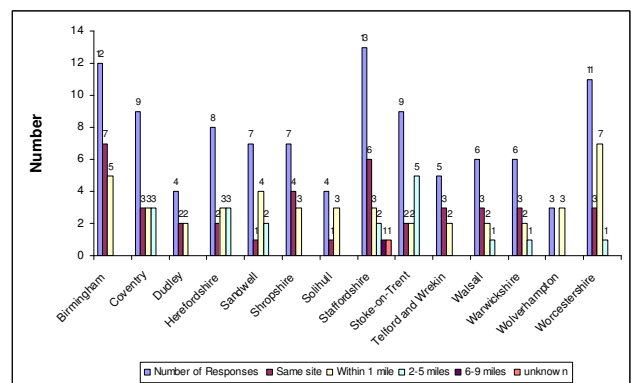
**Figure 8: How is water available?**



**Figure 9: Healthy Eating Choices in Leisure Centre Cafes**



**Figure 10: How far is your leisure centre from the nearest secondary school?**



**School Leisure Centres**

Throughout the West Midlands, leisure centres were found to contain an average of three vending machines per facility, but when stand alone leisure centres were compared with leisure centres attached to schools it was found that stand alone leisure centres have on average of twice as many vending machines as school based leisure centres (4 compared to 2).

School-based leisure centres provided a wider variety of healthy drinks (see definition) with at least one healthy drink per vending machine. In comparison only 44% of cold drink vending machines within non-school-based leisure centres provided an option for a healthy cold drink. Although there were less vending machines within school-based leisure centres they were also less likely to offer a healthy snack than other leisure centres (10.5%; 32.8% respectively).

**Key Findings**

- 40/104 respondents were school-based leisure/sports centres
- Overall there were an average of 3 vending machines per leisure centre
- There are significantly more drinks vending machines (246) than snack vending machines (89)
- Within the 89 snack vending machines, only 25 healthy snacks were available
- Within the 180 cold drink vending machines there were 106 healthy drinks available.

- 95/104 (91%) of leisure centres provide access to free drinking water with the majority offering it via a tap in the toilet area.
- 33/104 (32%) leisure centres have a café- 27 (82%) of those cafés have fresh fruit and vegetables available.

### Limitations of this survey

The sample size of this survey is small (only 25%) and does not represent every sport and leisure centre. The survey was not addressed to an individual and the response is therefore based on the knowledge of whoever who was filling in the survey. Although definitions were provided for consistency purpose, we cannot be certain that the definition of “healthy” was understood.

### Recommendations

- Healthier options should be available in all vending machines – see the School Food Trust healthier vending resource for further advice.
- Ensure that all drink vending machines have an option of plain or sparkling water, 100% fruit juice or milk based drinks with less than 5% sugar.
- As a minimum all cafes should provide fruit and vegetables (fresh and dried) and drinks as above.
- It is important that snack vending machines also provide a healthy option such as dried fruit, nuts and seeds. The use of refrigerated vending opens up the options of vending food such as sandwiches and fresh fruit.
- Water should be freely available and palatable preferably from water coolers or fountains.

### Conclusions

Vending machine is a quick and easy point for food and drinks and is also profitable. People often visit sports and leisure centres to exercise and support a healthy lifestyle, however the food and drink choices available to them do not help them to do so as they are generally high in fat, salt and sugar. Of particular concern is the limited availability of healthy snack vending in sport centres that are on the same site as schools. While a lot of work is being done to get schools to offer healthy choices to their pupils, the same needs to be done by sports and leisure centres, especially those on the same site as schools. It is pointless to introduce healthy eating in schools, only to have the pupils nipping into the on site sports centre or down the road to buy confectionery and fizzy drinks. Schools are succeeding in changing vending practice through moving away from conventional vending of processed snack products and replacing them with real food and snacks and mini-meals. The use of refrigerated vending opens up the options of vending food such as sandwiches and fresh fruit. The SFT Healthier vending resource provides clear information on healthier vending and is a useful resource to support local authorities looking at the vending on offer in their sports and leisure centres.

### References

School Food Trust 2008 A Fresh Look at vending in schools [www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk](http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk)

# Leisure Centre Food and Drink Survey 2008



West Midlands Public Health Group  
c/o 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Kingston House  
438 High Street  
West Bromwich  
B70 9LD

The Public Health Group of the Department of Health, West Midlands are conducting research into the provision of food and drink in sports and leisure centres within the West Midlands. The survey aims to provide a snapshot of food choices available within facilities across the region to support us in developing appropriate work programmes in diet/nutrition.

The survey has six questions, we would be very grateful if you could complete this short survey and fax or post back to Naomi Jones fax: 0121 612 1501, address: 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Kingston House, 438 High Street, West Bromwich **by Monday, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2008.**

**All surveys will be entered into a prize draw for a fruit and vegetable hamper, you only need to provide your contact details if you wish to be entered into the draw.**

	<b>Leisure/Sports Centre Name</b>	
	<b>Contact Name</b>	
	<b>Telephone Number</b>	
<b>1</b>	<b>How many vending machines do you have in your leisure/sports centre? (please circle as appropriate)</b>	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
<p><b>Definitions</b></p> <p><b>A healthy drink includes</b> – water – plain or sparkling, 100% fruit/vegetable juice or diluted fruit juices, milk/yoghurt drinks with less than 5% added sugar .</p> <p><b>The following do not count – flavoured waters, fizzy carbonated drinks, sports drinks.</b></p> <p><b>Healthy food/snacks include:</b> dried fruit, fruit pots, yoghurts, sandwiches made with wholemeal/whole grain bread, fresh fruit and vegetables, nuts and seeds with no added salt or sugar.</p> <p><b>The following do not count – cereal bars, crisps, sweets, flapjacks.</b></p>		
<b>2.</b>	<b>What type of vending machines do you have?</b>	
	Number of vending machines	Number of <b>types</b> of healthy snacks/drinks included (see definitions above)
	Snacks	
	Hot drinks	
	Cold drinks	
	Mixed Products	
	Other	
<b>3</b>	<b>Do you provide access to free drinking water?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>If yes, how is water provided</b>	<b>Yes/No</b> <b>Location</b>
	Water coolers	
	Water fountain	
	Taps in toilets	
	Other	

4	Do you have a café?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
5	<b>If yes, does it sell any of the following (please tick as many as apply)</b>		
	Fresh Fruit and Vegetables		
	Dried fruit and vegetables		
	Water – Plain or sparkling		
	100% fruit juice		
	Nuts and seeds without added salt or sugar		
6	<b>Where is the nearest secondary school from your leisure/sports centre? (please tick)</b>		
	Same site		
	Within 1 mile		
	2-5 miles		
	6-9 miles		
	10 miles or more		

The information collected from the survey will be published as a report. If you would like the results of this survey, please provide your email address: .....

**Thank you for you time**

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact:  
 Catherine.goodridge@sandwell-pct.nhs.uk