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Institute of
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Health



Policy briefing note – fast food outlets

The proliferation of fast food outlets is contributing to the obesity epidemic.

Local authorities should be able to limit the opening of new outlets, particularly in sensitive areas such as around schools and parks.

Easy access to retail outlets offering affordable, healthier options is a clear way of helping consumers to avoid unhealthy alternatives.

Tackling obesity and promoting healthy eating is high on the public health agenda. The CIEH has, for some time, been working to support the need for improvement through **publishing reports, introducing toolkits, supporting healthy eating awards** and generally seeking to identify areas where EHPs can develop and promote interventions.

Fast food outlets have become a focus of attention as the food they serve is often high in fat, salt and sugar whereas healthier options, if available at all, are generally limited.

In 2008, a cross-Government report stated that: “Local authorities can use existing planning powers to control more carefully the number and location of fast food outlets in their local areas.”

A number of studies from both the United States and in the UK have indicated a link between consumption of food and drink from fast food outlets and a greater likelihood of obesity.

One recent study of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets by City University found that 97 percent of families lived within a ten minute walk of a convenience fast food outlet or grocery store. It was found that the grocery stores offered a very limited range of fresh produce. Analysis of fast food meals in the study showed that a typical meal contained an unhealthy nutrient profile, based on Food Standard Agency (FSA) modelling.

The CIEH will continue to work with relevant Universities, the Department of Health and other organisations active in this area of policy to advocate the need for more proactive public health and planning policy to limit the proliferation of fast food outlets.