

KickStart Breakfasts and Indicators of Child Health in Linked Administrative Data

June 2018

About KickStart

The KickStart Breakfast programme was established in 2009 as a partnership between Fonterra and Sanitarium. School communities run KickStart Breakfast clubs, and Fonterra and Sanitarium supply milk and Weet-Bix breakfast cereal. Participating schools and kura are overwhelmingly positive about the KickStart breakfast programme.

In 2013, Government funding allowed KickStart to be offered five days per week instead of two, and to all schools and kura decile 1-10, not just decile 1-4.

Schools get to choose whether they take-up KickStart, how many days a week they serve the breakfasts, and how many of their students they feed. Take up is highest in low decile primary schools and in kura kaupapa Māori (which are mainly decile 1-2). Māori and Pacific children make up the majority of students aged under 13 in the schools and kura receiving KickStart.

What this study did

We examined the association between schools' uptake of the KickStart Breakfast programme and administrative data that could indicate whether there were improvements in oral health and bone health for students.

What we expected to see

We expected to see improvements in health based on international studies. Studies show that eating a healthy breakfast can lead to improvements in academic performance, appears to improve diet quality overall, and may protect against weight gain. Existing evidence would suggest that school food programmes that boost dairy intake can improve teeth and bones in particular.

What we found

One additional KickStart breakfast per student per week taken up by a school or kura receiving the programme is associated with a 1.2 percentage point reduction in the proportion of students with a dental surgery outpatient visit.

Given the average annual rate of such events over the study sample is 8.6 percent, this represents a substantial reduction of about a one-sixth.

We can't say whether the reduction reflects the causal impact of KickStart. It was too difficult to separate out the impact of KickStart from the many other programmes in schools that aim to improve the health and wellbeing of students.

However possible causal mechanisms do exist. One is that KickStart increased quality of students' diets and decreased consumption of sugary food and drinks. This would suggest the potential for wider benefits including reduced obesity, improvements in learning, and reductions in health disparities.

There was no clear association with measures of bone fracture. It is not clear why this was the case. A possible explanation is that injuries and falls increased as a result of increased energy, while at the same time children were less likely to fracture upon falling as a result of improvements in bone health. The general patterning of results does suggest that rates of injury causing fracture are higher among more nutritionally advantaged students.

What participating schools and kura say about KickStart

95% of participating schools and kura are very satisfied with the programme.

"Breakfast Club has considerably improved children's health and oral hygiene. Their attendance, appearance and attitude have contributed to this result. What an amazing turnabout!"

"Breakfast Club has brought on improved concentration, on-going stamina and success levels, manners and a decrease in negative playground behaviour."

"Students are more alert. The social interaction of eating together is also very positive."

"Children enjoyed the social element of the Breakfast Clubs. They would dine and chat with each other. We found this a very good thing for students who struggled to make good behaviour choices."

"The Breakfast Club is going stronger and stronger. The tamariki are still the ones running it with the teachers supervising."¹

¹ <https://kickstartbreakfast.co.nz/> retrieved 21 June 2017.