

COST-EFFECTIVENESS OF WATER PROMOTION STRATEGIES IN SCHOOLS

Erica L. Kenney, Angie L. Cradock, Michael W. Long, Jessica L. Barrett, Catherine M. Giles, Zachary J. Ward, Steven L. Gortmaker



FIRST PUBLISHED

November 20, 2019

FULL TEXT

<https://doi.org/10.1002/oby.22615>

SUGGESTED CITATION

Cost-Effectiveness of Water Promotion Strategies in Schools for Preventing Childhood Obesity and Increasing Water Intake. Kenney EL, Cradock AL, Long MW, Barrett JL, Giles CM, Ward ZJ, Gortmaker SL. *Obesity*. 2019 Dec. doi:[10.1002/oby.22615](https://doi.org/10.1002/oby.22615).

©2015 President and Fellows of Harvard College. All rights reserved. The CHOICES name, acronym, and logo are marks of the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

THE ISSUE

Increasing access to and promotion of drinking water in schools could help improve child health in a number of ways, including better hydration, improved cognition, and healthier teeth, if the water is fluoridated. However, there is limited evidence on how promoting water in schools could reduce childhood obesity and the costs of strategies that could facilitate such promotion.

The authors of this study sought to estimate the cost-effectiveness of installing chilled water dispensers (known as “water jets”) on school lunch lines and how it could impact childhood obesity.

To assess their cost-effectiveness and impact on water intake, the team used the CHOICES model to estimate over a 10-year time frame the impact of each of four strategies – Grab a Cup, Fill it Up (an intervention where signage and disposable cups are placed next to existing water fountains), portable water dispensers, bottle-less water coolers, and water jets – on children in kindergarten through eighth grade attending schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). They also estimated how water jets could impact the number of cases of childhood obesity in 2025.

Key findings from the study included:



Water jets would cost **\$4.25 per child** in the first year



Water jets could **prevent nearly 180,000 cases of childhood obesity** in the year 2025



Over 10 years, water jets could **save nearly \$390 million in health care costs nationally**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Making water jets available for students on school lunch lines could save almost half of the money required to install these dispensers, and could positively impact child health. Interventions that promote drinking water are lower-cost solutions to consider adding to the toolkit of public health school-based strategies to reduce obesity risk.