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Healthier Meals for Leicestershire Nurseries

After taking part in a national survey, Trading Standards in Leicestershire is encouraging parents and carers to look at the food provided at their children's nurseries.

Samples of all the food provided over the course of a week were taken from 12 nurseries in the county as part of an extensive two year study coordinated by LACORS, part of the Local Government Association Group.

The food has been analysed by Leicestershire Scientific Services and dieticians / nutritionists have reported on the findings.

All the nurseries were putting a lot of effort into providing healthy meals, but the survey found that there is room for improvement. Problems varied but in Leicestershire the analysis showed:

- High levels of salt found at all nurseries
- Inappropriate portion sizes, mainly too large but sometimes too small

A common problem was applying healthy eating principles which work for adults and older children to the under fives, despite their very different needs.

The nutritionists recommended that all nurseries reduce the reliance on packet mixes, gravy, soup, bread and processed meat to reduce salt levels. There was also a recommendation to reduce the reliance on bread at tea time and use lower salt alternatives such as jacket potatoes or pasta.

Nationally it was found that some children were not getting enough carbohydrates to give them energy because they were being given too much fruit.

The project showed that food nutritional standards were improved when childcare providers were given better information about how to give very young children the right diet.

David Bull, Head of Trading Standards for Leicestershire County Council, said: "Currently there are no legal controls concerning the nutritional content of food provided by children's nurseries as there is for schools, so I am pleased with the enthusiasm shown by all the nurseries involved to engage with this project and to apply the nutritionists' recommendations.

"Of course it is very important that the food offered by nurseries provides children with the correct amount of energy and a good balance of key nutrients and so, as a result of this work, advice and guidance has been provided to all nurseries in Leicestershire"

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Notes for the editor:

Leicestershire's sampling was part of an extensive two year study coordinated by LACORS, part of the Local Government Association Group. The survey found that none of the nurseries which volunteered were managing to meet all of the current guidelines on food for this age group, despite many putting a lot of effort into providing healthy menus.

- The national report is available here:
<http://www.lacors.gov.uk/lacors/ViewDocument.aspx?docID=23562&docType=C>
- A copy of the East Midlands regional report and of the guidance is available on request and on the website:
- [http://www.leics.gov.uk/nutrition in nursery schools east midlands regional report .pdf](http://www.leics.gov.uk/nutrition%20in%20nursery%20schools%20east%20midlands%20regional%20report.pdf)
- [http://www.leics.gov.uk/nutrition in nursery schools east midlands regional guidance.pdf](http://www.leics.gov.uk/nutrition%20in%20nursery%20schools%20east%20midlands%20regional%20guidance.pdf)
- Funding for the nutritional analysis was provided by the Department of Health, East Midlands
- Leicestershire Scientific Services is part of Regulatory Services, Chief Executive's Department, Leicestershire County Council, and includes the Public Analyst Service for Leicestershire.
- One of the nurseries which took part is the Lighthouse Day Nursery, in Wigston. The catering manager, Dawn, is available to comment on what it was like to take part in the project, but is not available for broadcast interview. The nursery can be contacted on 0116 2812722 any weekday morning.