Background: Currently, flavored or unflavored low-fat (1%) and non-fat milk can be served to children 2 years and older as part of CACFP. Unflavored whole milk must be served to chldren 12 to 23 months of age.

USDA's Proposed Rule: Unflavored low-fat (1%) and nonfat milk and flavored nonfat milk may be served to children two years of age and older. Only unflavored whole milk may be served to children 12 to 23 months of age.[1]

Our Recommendation: Consistent with the IOM Committee on CACFP, we recommend that flavored milk should not be allowed in CACFP.[2]

Rationale: Milk intake is nutritionally important and a leading source of calcium and vitamin D in the diets of U.S. children.[3,4] Flavored milk has been promoted as a way to get children to drink more milk[5] and in the past three decades flavored milk intake has increased,[6] currently averaging 28% of total milk consumed by children 2-11 years old.[7]

However, calcium intakes by young children exceed recommended amounts; 96% of 2-3 years old children and 77.2% of 4-8 year old children have intakes above the Adequate Intake for calcium.[4] In addition, there are health risks associated with drinking flavored milk. Compared to children who do not consume flavored milk, flavored-milk consumers have lower intakes of folate, vitamin A and vitamin C, and higher intakes of total calories and percent of energy from saturated fat.[7,8,9] On average, fat-free flavored milk (140 calories and 25 g sugar per cup) has the same calorie content as whole, unflavored milk (140 kcals and 12 g sugar per cup).[10] A child drinking a cup of flavored milk at breakfast and a cup at lunch is ingesting 5-8 tsp of added sugar every day, the equivalent of drinking an 8 oz serving of soda. The American Heart Association, however, recommends that 4 to 8 years olds consume no more than 3 tsp of added sugar daily.[11] Further, based on a California statewide study of childcare, flavored milk is served by a minority of childcare sites, suggesting the flavored milk is neither necessary nor difficult to do without.[12] Finally, flavored milk can cost more than unflavored milk.[13]

These findings suggest that young children are consuming adequate amounts of milk without the need to introduce flavored milk with added sugar and calories into childcare settings. Given that habits developed in early childhood tend to track into later years,[14] serving young children unflavored milk in childcare settings can set the stage for lifelong healthy habits. Conversely, providing flavored milk to young children may make them more likely to prefer sugared milk later in life.

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