

## **PRIMARY & SECONDARY**

### **GENERAL ISSUES**

#### **ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

#### **OBESE & OVERWEIGHT CHILDREN – PERCENTAGES – 2014 TO JULY 2022**

**(26.07.2022)**

**(No. B/960) Mrs K. Foo Kune-Bacha (Second Member for Beau Bassin & Petite Rivière)** asked the Minister of Health and Wellness whether, in regard to obese and overweight children, he will state the percentages thereof in Mauritius since the year 2014 to date, indicating –

- (a) the percentages thereof suffering from diabetes, and
- (b) if consideration will be given for the banning of advertising of high fat, salt or sugar (HFSS) food or drink products directed towards children.

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, as per the last National Nutrition Survey carried out in 2012, 9.9% of children aged between 5 to 11 years, were found to be obese. With regard to children aged 13 to 17 years, the Global School Based Survey carried out in 2017 in collaboration with Centres for Disease Control and Prevention has revealed that 9.1% of adolescents were obese, and another 15.7% were overweight.

I wish to inform the House that my Ministry is currently carrying out the National Nutrition Survey 2022 from 23 July to 10 August 2022. The main objective of this survey is to study food consumption patterns and assess the nutritional status of the population with a view to address diet and nutrition related health problems, and non-communicable diseases in the country. Children 5-11 years old will be included in this survey.

With regard to part (a) of the question, information is available for type I diabetes children who are being treated in our government hospitals, and the number of new cases of type I diabetes diagnosed among children and adolescents for the period 2014 till June 2022 is 121.

Mr Speaker, Sir, with regard to part (b) of the question, I wish to inform the House that saturated fat in specific foods is regulated in the current Food Regulations 1999. It is worth to

note that the Food (Sale of Food on Premises of Educational Institutions) Regulations 2009, Schedule (Regulation 3) already makes provision for food which may be sold on the educational institutions campus which is in force as from 2010.

Furthermore, I wish to highlight that in the forthcoming Food Regulations under the Food Act, which are under preparation, trans-fatty acids will also be regulated at not more than 1% on a fat weight basis. Salt will also be regulated in the new Food Regulations.

Moreover, a Nutrient Profile Model in Mauritius is underway. This model will be used as a tool for banning of advertising of high fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) food or drink products directed towards children.

The nutrient profile is a scientific method for categorising food and beverage items according to their nutritional composition. It provides a method of differentiating between foods and non-alcoholic beverages that are admissible in a healthy diet from those that are unhealthy, notably those foods that may contribute to consumption of excess energy, saturated fats, transfats, sugars and salt.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has adopted nutrient profiling as a useful tool to define foods whose marketing should be restricted as part of the implementation of the recommendations endorsed by the World Health Assembly on the marketing of foods to children.

A regional Nutrient Profile Model has already been developed for the African countries by WHO. Technical assistance of the World Health Organisation has been enlisted for the Mauritius Nutrient Profile Model that is underway. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha:** Merci. Suite à la réponse de l'honorable ministre, on peut conclure que le taux d'enfants en situation de surpoids et d'obésité est alarmant. C'est un fait que de manger sain et équilibré coûte plus cher, et de surcroît, le contexte actuel de la diminution du pouvoir d'achat accentue le problème de malbouffe. Quelle est donc la stratégie de son ministère pour encourager l'alimentation saine et aussi pour décourager les mauvaises habitudes alimentaires, particulièrement chez les enfants ?

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, we are all concerned with obesity and with the pattern on food. That is why, in my reply, I have stated we are doing the National Nutrition Survey which is very important. Also, the Food Act that will be coming into force, especially foods that I have mentioned with trans-fats and all that, how to limit it especially for children.

So, all this will be coming soon. And also, with the Food Standard Agency, all these information will be given to anybody, whichever food you wish to have, you can always get the information there. It is very important to have this nutrient profile model for Mauritius so that we can know what is the nutrient profile for any individual. So, all these are actions already taken.

Now, what I will probably request all Members of this House is to promote healthy eating and healthy habits. We all have to be role models in promoting such activities. The Prime Minister is doing it, through regularly participating...

*(Interruptions)*

Yes, the Prime Minister is doing it - I will maintain - through regularly participating in physical activities, which is very important so that we can, at the same time, eat healthily and have a healthy lifestyle. For promotion of activities, I will also welcome you all. We all participate so that we can also send the right signal; the right information to the population. Because only by having regulations and information and not acting as role models, we will keep on having the percentage of obesity, especially among the young generation, it will keep on rising.

**Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha:** Permettez-moi d'abord de faire une suggestion et puis je vais poser ma deuxième question supplémentaire. J'aimerais suggérer à l'honorable ministre que les produits emballés qui sont riches en sucre, sel et gras saturés soient munis d'étiquettes de mise en garde pour aider les consommateurs à réaliser le choix alimentaire plus conscient. Ça c'est une suggestion. Et ma deuxième question est de demander à l'honorable ministre s'il y a eu une étude pour connaître le fardeau économique sur le système de santé relatif au coût des maladies associées aux habitudes alimentaires malsaines ?

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Hon. Member, thank you very much. This is a very valid suggestion, on all the food packets that we have, to highlight, especially the amount of sugars or salt in there. So, yes, this will be coming in the Food Regulations that we will come up with soon because the Consultant is still working on that. And concerning the second part of your question ?

**Mrs Foo Kune-Bacha:** Une étude sur le fardeau économique sur le système de santé relatif au coût des maladies associées aux habitudes alimentaires malsaines.

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Mr Speaker, Sir, we will soon be receiving the Non-Communicable Disease survey. So, we will see what the report of that NCD survey is because this NCD survey is being done recently; and the report is expected in the coming days or probably by next week.

So, based on this NCD survey and with this nutrition survey, we can plan, we see what is the different strategies that we have to adopt, especially about what you are mentioning. You are perfectly right.

**Mrs Luchmun Roy:** Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir. In his reply, the hon. Minister mentioned about healthy lifestyle and he even mentioned about physical activities. For a fact, we know that the Minister of Sports is laying much emphasis on what is called, physical activities. But, can he inform the House whether his Ministry is coming forward with maybe some kind of an Action Plan, especially for children in order to promote physical activities? Thank you.

**Dr. Jagutpal:** Yes, Mr Speaker, Sir, let me first congratulate the Minister of Sports. Through the Mauritius Sports Council, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, we have been working together, especially to foster this culture of community sports and physical activities, for promoting sports for everybody, even for patients.

Recently, Active Mauritius has come up with a new design, that is, prescription of a physical activity for patients suffering from NCD. So, these have recently been launched, I think, six months ago, again on a pilot basis, to see how physical activity can promote in the wellbeing, especially instead of depending only on medication when it concerns non-communicable diseases. So, all these sensitisation programmes at the policy level have been worked out together with the Mauritius Sports Council, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education.

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#### **SAINT BARTHOLOMEW'S COLLEGE - INJURED STUDENT - INQUIRY**

**(26.07.2022)**

**(No. B/950) Mrs A. Navarre-Marie (Fourth Member for GRNW & Port Louis West)** asked the Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology whether, in regard to the incident which occurred at the Saint Bartholomew's College on Tuesday 28 June 2022 wherein a student was severely injured, she will state if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and, if so, indicate the outcome thereof.

**The Vice-Prime Minister, Minister of Education, Tertiary Education, Science and Technology (Mrs L. D. Dookun-Luchoomun):** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Private Secondary Education Authority that on Tuesday 28 June 2022, an incident involving three students took place at Saint Bartholomew's College during the afternoon small break. Following a fight which broke in the school corridor, staff of the school intervened to stop them. The three students were rusticated. The responsible parties of the three students were informed of the incident. The student who was assaulted and injured was taken to the Jeetoo Hospital for treatment by his responsible party who, later on the same day, reported the matter to the police.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I am further informed that on 29 June 2022, the *Brigade pour la Protection de la Famille* met the injured student and his responsible party. They were sensitised on the consequences of antisocial behaviour and were requested to attend the mediation to be carried out with the students at the school in presence of their respective parents. However, they declined to participate in that meeting. They were subsequently referred to the psychologist of the CDU and on the same day, the *Brigade pour la Protection de la Famille* proceeded to Saint Bartholomew's College where a working session was held in relation to the above incident. The matter was referred to the Probation and Aftercare Services by virtue of Section 50 of the Children's Act 2020.

Mr Speaker, Sir, an educational psychologist from the Ministry effected a school visit on 04 July 2022 to meet the students. My Ministry has been informed that the injured student has sought transfer to another school and the PSEA had convened the parents for procedures regarding the transfer of their ward on 12 July 2022. The responsible parties informed that their ward was already receiving psychological help from the CDU and the transfer procedures were completed on 21 July 2022. Counselling sessions with all three students and their responsible parties have been scheduled on Monday 25 July and Tuesday 26 July 2022. Sensitisation sessions have been scheduled at the school for the students.

**Mrs Navarre-Marie:** Merci. La ministre, pourrait-elle nous donner les raisons pour lesquelles la direction de l'école n'a pas cru bon d'appeler le SAMU alors que l'enfant saignait abondamment ?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that the parents were informed and the parents had told the school that they would come and pick up the student immediately.

**Mr Uteem:** I just listened to the hon. Minister. The person happens to be in my Constituency. The parents are in my constituency, and I can assure the hon. Vice-Prime Minister that the school took around half an hour to 40 minutes to contact the parents. So, in the meantime for 40 minutes, the child was bleeding profusely. May I know from the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether there is a protocol which is there to be followed by all secondary schools in case of brutality or injured student in a college?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed that various schools have various protocols. At the time of admission, there is an agreement made by parents and the school management as to what to do; some parents would prefer their children to be sent to clinic, others to hospitals, and some parents prefer to comment pick their children themselves. In that particular case, I have been informed that the parents informed the college management that they would be taking the student straightaway to hospital. This is the information that I have.

**Mr Speaker:** Hon. Mrs Mayotte!

**Mrs Mayotte:** Thank you Mr Speaker, Sir. Can the hon. Vice-Prime Minister state whether the perpetrators are still at same school, and if so, are they being monitored by any psychologists?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, the National Educational Counselling services of the Ministry will continue to follow the students and try to see how best to help them so as to develop the right attitude in school.

**Mr Speaker:** Mrs Luchmun Roy!

**Mrs Luchmun Roy:** It has already been canvassed. Thank you, Mr Speaker, Sir.

**Mr Osman Mahomed:** Can I ask the hon. Vice-Prime Minister whether as a consequence of this very sad happening, the two boys have had to change schools?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Mr Speaker, Sir, what happened is that one of the children, in fact the one who was assaulted, has requested for a transfer. Normally, in cases of quarrel within school, we do not normally ask students to be transferred because we need to help them build up their character and self-esteem ensuring that they can cope in such situations. But in this particular case, the parents insisted to get the children transferred. So, they went to the PSEA, and this was done.

**Mr Osman Mahomed:** Both families?

**Mrs Dookun-Luchoomun:** Pardon? Now, if the parents request for transfer, we cannot do much. I have been told that the injured student had requested for transfer.