School Water Policies

We know that water is important for health. A New Resource review for Water: The Foundation of a Healthy Body¹ is a good example of educational material we can use to

spread the word. But it was the article in this issue by Sharma et al on the Strength and Comprehensiveness of Drinking Water Language in California School District Wellness Policies² that prompted me to wonder about water fountains in schools during this resurgence in COVID transmissions and with many children back to face-to-face instruction. Part of the drinking water policy evaluation looked at water access, promotion, and water quality checks. The article also pointed out that water during the school day is important to children's health. School Wellness Policies can contribute to healthy water intake while at school.

But what about now? I still am wondering about those water fountains. I did a little searching, not exhaustive, but I found little information about water fountains in schools during the pandemic. Anecdotal, I know many were turned off and covered to prevent access. Before the pandemic, concerns about lead in the water,³ functioning water fountains, and cleanliness of fountains have been published.⁴ An excellent review of drinking water in the United States provides background, context, and suggestions for improving water intake.⁵ And we know that hard surfaces have been found to have little conveyance of the COVID virus.⁶ Interestingly, the CDC has guidelines for reopening water systems after prolonged shutdown⁷ as well as for cleaning and disinfection,⁸ but little on school water fountains in particular.

Are refillable water bottles the answer? One study in Austria reported that providing refillable water bottles increased water intake in third-grade students but the control school students also increased water intake. The authors concluded that the measurement in drinking habits may have provided the attention needed to motivate increased water intake.⁹ While this more simplistic approach may work, I found the *Aquatic Program* very interesting not only for its sustainability perspective in decreasing disposable water bottles but also for the intervention based on the Multiple Phase Optimization Strategy (MOST)¹⁰ and the theoretical model of Comprehensive Action Determination Model (CADM).¹¹ I haven't seen this intervention strategy or theoretical model used much in the manuscripts we receive at JNEB, but I plan to do some additional reading. I encourage you to as well.

I will keep looking into the school water issues during the pandemic. If any of you have more information, please send me a line.

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