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Welfare Food Managers and Finance Officers  
In Strategic Health Authorities and  
Primary Care Trusts

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Dear colleague

### **HEALTHY START/WELFARE FOOD SCHEME: IMPORTANT UPDATE**

*Please cascade this update to all your colleagues involved in delivering these schemes. If the contact details we have used to send it are out of date, **please notify us immediately**. Send changes to [healthystart@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:healthystart@dh.gsi.gov.uk)*

### **HEALTHY START**

#### Timetable for Phase 2 – National Roll out

We remain on course to introduce Healthy Start vouchers across Great Britain in around November 2006. Northern Ireland expect to introduce them at the same time. Our aim is that all Healthy Start vouchers will be usable at participating shops anywhere in the UK.

From national roll-out, the upper age limit for children to receive Healthy Start vouchers will be their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday. We will shortly be writing about this to families currently getting either milk tokens or Healthy Start vouchers and who have children that are already 4 years old, or will become 4 within the next few months. We will also be updating the token and voucher letters for new families coming onto the schemes in future.

#### Evaluation of Phase 1 (Devon and Cornwall)

We have now received a draft of the independent evaluation report prepared by Symbia-Tavistock on the early impact of Healthy Start in Devon and Cornwall. It shows that, overall, Healthy Start Phase 1 was successfully implemented. Some constructive recommendations for Phase 2 were made and we will be taking these on board. When finalised, we will publish an Executive Summary of the report including all its recommendations on the Department of Health website. In the meantime some key learning points that we would like to share with you now are:

- We, at the centre need to use a variety of different methods for giving health professionals and other NHS staff information about Healthy Start. We are reshaping our approach to training so we can achieve this.
- We also need to engage senior managers in thinking strategically about the role of Healthy Start to that they can provide better support to health professionals by putting its delivery in the context of broader national and local public health initiatives, and nominate local “champions”.

- We must emphasise in our materials that pregnant women under 18 years old can get vouchers until their baby is born even if they are not on any benefits.
- We must also communicate more clearly to beneficiaries that Healthy Start is **replacing** the Welfare Food Scheme and that they will receive new Healthy Start vouchers **instead** of milk tokens.
- Health professionals could do more to signpost locally relevant classes, programmes and initiatives that complement the breastfeeding, healthy eating and lifestyle messages underpinning Healthy Start. This will reinforce in a concrete way the advice and direct support they are already giving.

#### Healthy Start Vitamin Supplements for Women and Children

Free vitamin supplements will be an important part of Healthy Start. Healthy Start branded vitamin drops for eligible children will be available later this year and should be actively promoted by health professionals. Women's vitamin tablets are expected to be available during 2007. PCTs should think how best to promote the uptake of vitamins within existing contacts with women and families on the scheme. In the meantime, it is important that health professionals continue to offer Abidec to children on the scheme whenever appropriate, and to refer eligible pregnant women needing supplements to their GP for a suitable prescription.

### **WELFARE FOOD SCHEME**

#### Lifespan

The Welfare Food Scheme will end at the point that Healthy Start is launched.

#### Infant formula

You should already be planning to manage down your stocks of powdered formula in readiness for the launch of phase 2 of Healthy Start. Please note that you must continue to meet your obligations to offer a minimum of 2 whey based and 2 casein based formula varieties. Please see our May 2006 update for a few good practice suggestions – make sure everyone that orders formula in your PCT is aware of what is happening. You will not be able to accept Healthy Start vouchers for infant formula – anyone wanting to use their vouchers for infant formula must do so at a participating retail outlet.

#### Feedback

For more information about Healthy Start visit the Healthy Start website [www.healthystart.nhs.uk](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk). If you have questions or comments about Healthy Start in general or anything in this update, please email us at [healthystart@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:healthystart@dh.gsi.gov.uk). If you have an urgent query you can telephone us. The team's contact numbers are:

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 Angela Walker 020 7972 1377 – Implementation Manager  
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Yours faithfully

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