Welcome to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s online training series about water access in schools. This series includes 4 modules, divided into 8 short videos, that introduce several topics about water in schools and what schools can do to ensure water is available, safe, and promoted as an ideal beverage choice. Each video is less than 5 minutes long. There are also knowledge check questions at the end of the series.

Let’s get started with the first topic, which is why it’s important to address water access in schools and what schools can do to help.

CDC has developed a comprehensive framework that describes the various aspects of the school nutrition environment and services that affect students’ access to healthy foods and beverages while at school. The framework highlights ways that foods and beverages are made available to students as well as the information and messages about foods and beverages that students encounter on school grounds.

Access to drinking water is a part of this framework, and aligns with recommendations from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, and the American Academy of Pediatrics that students should have access to water during the school day because of the multiple health benefits of drinking water.

Additionally, there are federal requirements that schools participating in the National School Lunch Program make free drinking water available to students at lunch time where the meals are served. This requirement also applies to breakfast when breakfast is served in the cafeteria, but not when breakfast is served in the classroom or as a grab-and-go option during a morning break. We will talk more about these requirements in Module 3.

Drinking water has many benefits.

Research shows that being hydrated can improve children’s memory and attention, and can help them think better.

Adequate hydration is needed for multiple body processes including digestion, moving nutrients around the body, and temperature regulation.

Children who primarily drink water or milk have fewer dental cavities than those who drink soda. Also, drinking water that has been fluoridated plays a role in preventing cavities.

Additionally, drinking water instead of sugary drinks can help prevent weight gain and some chronic diseases. For example, the added sugars in sugary drinks are risk factors for some chronic diseases including type two diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Replacing sugary drinks with water can lower the risk of these chronic diseases.

Despite the many health benefits associated with drinking water and being hydrated, research shows that more than 1 in 5 children and adolescents do not drink any water during the day (Rosinger 2019).

And, about half of school-age children are underhydrated (Kenney 2015). Being underhydrated was more common among boys, younger children aged 6-11, and non-Hispanic black children and adolescents compared with girls, older children, and white children and adolescents respectively.

Because most school aged youth spend at least 5 hours a day at school, schools have the opportunity to help kids stay hydrated the healthy way by making safe water available at no charge throughout the school day.

The following learning modules will address three key strategies for schools, including ensuring that drinking water is safe, increasing access to water, and promoting water as the ideal beverage for hydrating kids.

Throughout each of the learning modules we will be sharing key resources to help schools in this work.

CDC has developed the Increasing Access to Drinking Water in Schools tool kit which outlines a step by step process for schools to assess current policies and practices related to drinking water, identify opportunities to improve access to water, and make an action plan to help put changes into action at school.

The National Drinking Water Alliance is a network of organizations and individuals across the country working to ensure that all children in the U.S. can drink safe water in the places where they live, learn and play.

Their website is a clearinghouse for essential drinking water research and resources including one page fact sheets that highlight key issues for schools.

The resources that we shared in this module are available at no cost on the following websites:

CDC’s Comprehensive Framework for Addressing the School Nutrition Environment and Services

https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/nutrition/schoolnutrition.htm

CDC’s Increasing Access to Drinking Water in Schools Tool Kit

https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/npao/wateraccess.htm

National Drinking Water Alliance Fact Sheets

https://www.drinkingwateralliance.org/facts

Thank you for completing this learning module. We will discuss water safety in Module 2.