



The availability of fast food outlets and grocery retailers in Northern Ireland and their distance to secondary schools



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Overview

This report details research undertaken by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to investigate the availability of fast food outlets and grocery retailers in Northern Ireland and specifically the options close to secondary schools.

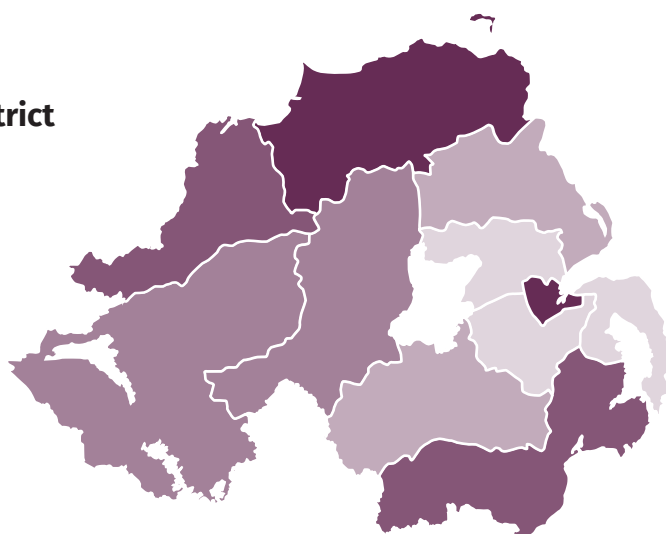
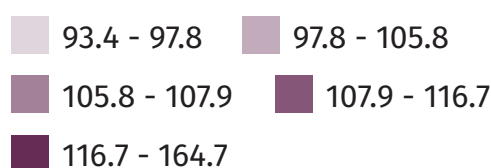
Although fast food outlets sometimes sell healthier foods, the majority of their products are typically high in fat, salt, or sugar (HFSS). Grocery retailers can also offer less healthy options; however, they tend to have more healthier choices than fast food outlets [1]. Therefore, this study examines the availability of fast food outlets and grocery retailers as indicators of less healthy and healthier options in Northern Ireland, respectively.

The rates of fast food outlets and grocery retailers per 100,000 population were calculated and assessed against deprivation and proximity to secondary schools. Further details are provided in [2].

Fast food outlets by local government district

Rate per 100,000 population

Northern Ireland average: 116.8



Region	Rate per 100,000 population	
	Fast food outlets	Grocery retailers
Northern Ireland	116.8	49.8
Antrim and Newtownabbey	93.4	43.3
Ards and North Down	97.8	50.7
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	105.6	35.2
Belfast	164.7	50.7
Causeway Coast and Glens	123.5	64.2
Derry City and Strabane	116.7	53.7
Fermanagh and Omagh	107.9	65.1
Lisburn and Castlereagh	94.6	39.6
Mid Ulster	107.8	59.2
Mid and East Antrim	105.8	47.5
Newry, Mourne and Down	109.8	47.8

Spotlight on secondary schools

The Health Inequalities Annual Report [3] stated that an average of 5.1% of Year 8 pupils were affected by obesity, with a higher proportion observed in the most deprived areas. Therefore, this study assessed the availability of fast food outlets and grocery retailers within a 400m radius (approx 5 min walk) of each secondary school in Northern Ireland.

2.2 Average number of fast food outlets within 400m.

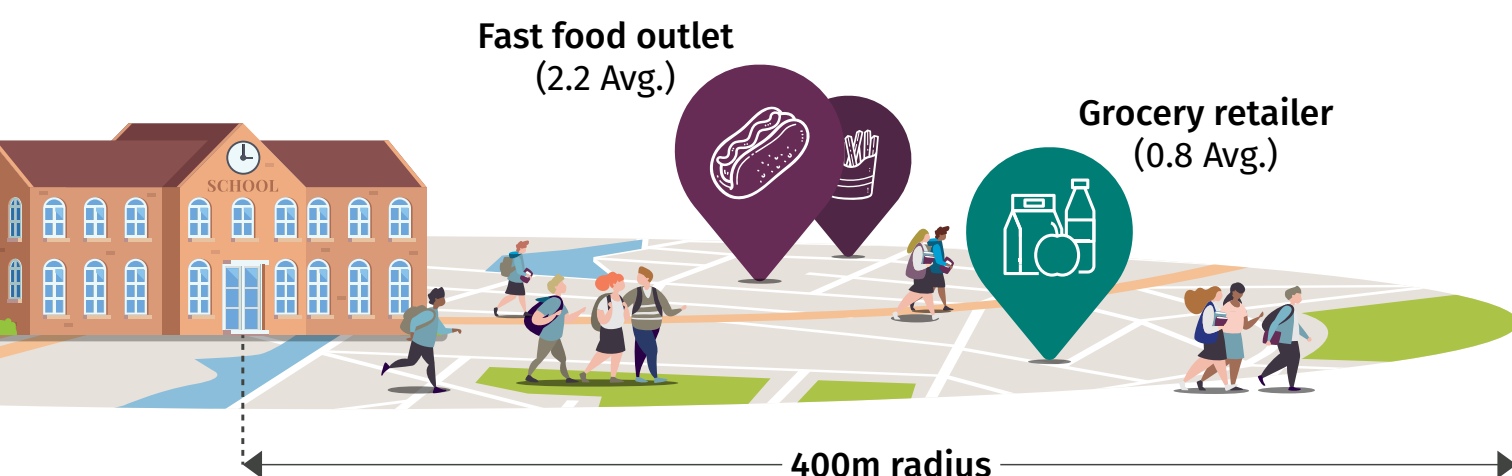
50% of schools have no fast food outlets within 400m.

17% of schools have 5 or more fast food outlets within 400m.

0.8 Average number of grocery retailers within 400m.

56% of schools have no grocery retailers within 400m.

25% of schools have 1 grocery retailer within 400m.



21



Highest number of fast food outlets within 400m

3.7



Highest average of fast food outlets within a region

0.6



Lowest average of fast food outlets within a region

Spotlight on secondary schools by region

Region	Number of secondary schools	Average fast food outlets within 400m	Average grocery retailers within 400m
Northern Ireland	190	2.2	0.8
Antrim and Newtownabbey	10	2.6	1.2
Ards and North Down	12	2.1	1.0
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	23	1.4	0.5
Belfast	32	3.7	0.7
Causeway Coast and Glens	16	2.7	1.4
Derry City and Strabane	14	1.3	0.6
Fermanagh and Omagh	18	3.7	1.2
Lisburn and Castlereagh	9	0.6	0.3
Mid Ulster	20	2.3	0.8
Mid and East Antrim	13	1.1	0.6
Newry, Mourne and Down	23	1.4	0.3



Trends with deprivation

1.8 times

The most deprived areas are 1.8 times more likely to have fast food outlets compared to the least deprived areas.



1.4 times

The most deprived areas are 1.4 times more likely to contain a grocery retailer than the least deprived areas.

The most deprived areas typically have more fast food outlets and more grocery retailers within 400m of a secondary school than the least deprived areas.

Summary



2.4 times
more fast food
outlets than grocery
retailers.

This study has assessed the availability of fast food and grocery retailers across Northern Ireland.

A wide variation of availability is seen across Local Government Districts, with on average 2.4 times more fast food outlets than grocery retailers.

There was a trend towards more fast food and grocery retailers in more deprived areas.

The study has shown that three-quarters of secondary schools have at least one grocery retailer within walking distance, which is likely to sell more healthier food and drink options compared to fast food outlets.

The link between availability and consumer behaviours has not been assessed here. There are likely to be factors other than availability that drive food choices and may impact health outcomes, such as: cost, taste preferences, advertising and promotions.

The FSA's Making Food Better programme [4] supports Northern Ireland food businesses to make the food environment healthier. Noting the high levels of fast food outlets in Northern Ireland, this study will inform the FSA's work with the food industry to increase the provision of healthier options in the out of home sector.

Note that the data used has a number of limitations, which should be considered when interpreting the results. Further information is provided in [2].



References

1. World Health Organization, The out-of-home food sector – exponential growth in an unregulated market (September 2021) <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/20-09-2021-the-out-of-home-food-sector-exponential-growth-in-an-unregulated-market>
2. The Availability of Fast Food Outlets and Grocery retailers in Northern Ireland and their Distance to Secondary Schools (Davis, Pimlott, Nally, Dunne, 2025) <https://doi.org/10.46756/001c.138457>
3. Health Inequalities Annual Report 2024 (Atcheson and Laverty, 2024) <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/health-inequalities-annual-report-2024>
4. Food Standards Agency, Making Food Better programme (March 2025) <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/healthier-food-reformulation>