



**OBESITY ACTION GROUP CALLS FOR BAN ON FOOD
ADVERTISING TO CHILDREN
18 September 2007, embargoed to 10am**

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is calling for a ban on all television advertising for foods and beverages during programmes where children make up a significant proportion of the viewing audience¹. The call follows the release of a report showing food and beverage advertising has a significant effect on what food children like, buy, ask for and eat. The report, *Would you like lies with that?, Food, kids and TV advertising*, looks at the influence of food and beverage television advertising on children's health.

OAC Director Leigh Sturgiss says children do not understand sales and marketing techniques and believe what they are told about unhealthy foods.

"Up to the age of 10 years children are easily misled by advertising, as they see it as entertainment or information. From 10 to 12 years children begin to understand the motives and aims of advertising more, but they still do not understand sales techniques.

"There is no doubt advertising of high-fat, high-sugar foods to these children is partly to blame for increased obesity rates."

She says children in New Zealand are exposed to large volumes of very persuasive advertising and marketing techniques which encourage them to choose energy-dense, low-nutrient foods over healthier options.

"Many New Zealand children watch a lot of television and are consequently exposed to considerable food and beverage advertising. Māori, Pacific, low-income children, and boys watch more television and videos than other children.

"In 2005, TV2 had an average of 12.8 food advertisements per hour between 3pm and 5pm. Eighty percent of TV3 food advertisements were for foods high in fat and/or sugar."

¹ 10 percent or more children in the viewing audience of a timeslot

She says total advertising in 2005 on chocolate, confectionery, and carbonated drinks (\$57,289,000) was over nine times the amount spent on advertising vegetables and fruit (\$6,215,000).

“Children are taken in by bright, fun ads with catchy jingles. They pester mum and dad to buy the food or beverages, and parents don’t stand a chance against the enormous advertising budgets of the food industry.

“We know from a survey carried out in 2005 that there is considerable public support for action to be taken on advertising of unhealthy products. Seventy-one percent of those surveyed agreed or strongly agreed advertisements for unhealthy food and drink should be banned during children’s television programmes.”

Leigh Sturgiss says regulation is the only way to control the number of adverts, along with their quality and content.

“Such regulation to protect children has been used in other countries, and New Zealand can learn from these when setting up a regulatory system. Mathematical modelling of possible obesity interventions shows that regulation of advertising is by far the single most effective intervention available.

“While regulation of television advertising would not solve the obesity issue by itself, it would be a very important part of the current response. We know what causes obesity, we know how to prevent it, and we just need to act effectively.”

She says New Zealand’s current system, in which advertising is self-regulated by the industry-run Advertising Standards Authority, is ineffective.

“Recent revisions of Codes of Advertising are insubstantial, and the Advertising Standards Complaints Board has no authority to impact on the number of adverts, and little authority over quality and content. Self-regulation does more to serve marketers whose aim is to increase profits than it does to protect children’s health.”

For further information:

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