

May 2007 - Call for ban on TV junk food advertising to children

Last Updated Friday, 25 May 2007

A new survey, commissioned by the Coalition on Food Advertising to Children, has found 86 per cent of parents with children under 14 want the Federal Government to place a ban on television advertising of junk foods to children.

Details of survey

The Coalition on Food Advertising to Children (CFAC), using Queensland Health funding, commissioned an independent survey on parents' attitudes to junk-food advertising. The survey collected responses from a random sample of over 400 parents with children under 14, from all over Australia.

The survey results indicated that over 86 per cent of parents want a complete ban on television junk-food advertisements aimed at children during popular viewing times. Nearly 89 per cent wanted stronger government-imposed restrictions on advertising.

Ban to support parents

The CFAC acknowledged that parents are ultimately responsible for their children's eating habits, but believe the presence of junk-food advertising makes it harder to raise healthy children.

NSW Cancer Council nutritionist and CFAC chair, Kathy Chapman, said 'Stopping junk-food ads when kids watch TV won't solve the obesity epidemic, but it's one way we can help children who are getting the wrong message about food.'

Read The Age's 'Parents want junk food TV ad ban: survey'.

Purpose of Coalition on Food Advertising to Children

The Coalition on Food Advertising to Children (CFAC) was formed in 2002 with the purpose of bringing about 'a marked reduction in the commercial promotion of foods and beverages to children under 14-years-old.'

The Coalition believes 'The vital first step is to extend the statutory regulations to prohibit all television food and beverage advertising during programs where children make up a significant proportion of the viewing audience.'

CFAC wants the Federal Government to ban all food advertisingâ€”not just for junk foodâ€”during children's peak-viewing timeslots, in order to prevent a â€”perpetual debate between what constitutes an unhealthy food between the food industry and nutritionists.' The ban would still permit advertising about healthy eatingâ€”such as the Federal Government's 'Go for 2 and 4' fruit and vegetable campaignâ€”during Community Service Announcement timeslots.

Members of the Coalition on Food Advertising to Children include:

- Australasian Society for the Study of Obesity
- Australian Confederation of Paediatric and Child Health Nurses
- Australian Consumers Association
- Australian Dental Association
- Australian Medical Association
- Dr Rosemary Stanton
- Nutrition Australia
- The Cancer Council Australia
- Women's and Children's Hospital, Adelaide
- Young Media Australia

Read the Children's Health Development Foundation's news item 'Coalition on Food Advertising to Children (CFAC)'.

Government response

Federal Health minister Tony Abbott's spokesperson indicated that the results of the Coalition on Food Advertising to Children survey would not change the Government's position on TV advertising.

Tony Abbott said that it was the responsibility of parents to lead by example and promote exercise and a healthy diet.

'There's been this constant chorus saying, "ban so-called junk food advertising," I think bans are the things that governments do when they want to look good rather than actually do good.

'I don't believe that banning food advertising is necessarily going to have an impact on childhood obesity.'

Abbott added that countries which had banned junk food advertising aimed at children still had comparable rates of child obesity as those countries without restrictions.

The vice-president of the Australian Medical Association (also a member of the CFAC) said that, nevertheless, it was 'common sense' a ban would make a difference, given that the companies who produce food advertising pay so much in order to have their ads screened during the timeslots that children are watching.

The Labor party brought out a policy to ban junk-food advertising to children prior to the past Federal election, but has yet to announce its current policies on advertising and junk food.

Read The Australian's 'Junk food ad ban not on: Abbott'.

NT Health supports ban

In opposition to the Federal Government's position, Northern Territory Health Minister Chris Burns has welcomed the call to ban junk-food advertising on prime-time television.

'... the states and territories are wanting to really regulate this area of activity but the Federal Government won't go near it. Now I don't know what conclusion you can draw from that but certainly there are some powerful interests involved.'

Several state health ministers are considering introducing a 'traffic light' system developed by Tasmania's Research Institute, which uses red, amber and green dots to indicate the quantity of salt, sugar and fats. The NT Health Minister also supports the system but believes it won't work unless the Commonwealth also bans junk-food advertising.

Read ABC News' 'Food labelling to fight the fat'.

Further reading

Related news items on the Early Childhood Australia website:

- March 2007 – Exercise guidelines for children under age five
- Feb 2007 – Early childhood research: The impact of infant weight gain
- Feb 2006 – Early Childhood Australia backs Government moves against childhood obesity

Related resources on the Early Childhood Australia website:

- Resource themes: Childhood obesity
- Every Child magazine – Healthy Children – Vol. 12 No. 2 2006
- Everyday learning about healthy bodies
- Active children: Healthy now and later

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