Restricting the Marketing of Unhealthy Foods to Children in Canada: Update from Health Canada

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To provide an update on Health Canada’s approach to restricting the marketing of unhealthy foods to children
Presentation Outline

• Background
• Policy update
• Monitoring considerations
• Next steps
Canada’s growing burden of chronic disease is undeniable, but it is also largely preventable.

Unhealthy diet is a primary risk factor for disease burden in Canada.
The Healthy Eating Strategy was launched October 2016

Vision: Make the healthier choice the easier choice for all Canadians

Collaboration with other federal initiatives such as *A Food Policy for Canada*

Better nutrition information
- Revise Food Guide
- Improve Food Labels
- Front-of-Package Labelling

Improve food quality
- Reduce Sodium in Food
- Prohibit Industrial Trans Fat

Protect vulnerable populations
- Restrict Marketing of Unhealthy Food & Beverages to Children

Improve food & nutrition education
- Support Nutrition North Education Initiatives

Meaningful impacts on long-term health outcomes for Canadians

Mutually-reinforcing initiatives developed using strong evidence and meaningful, open and transparent consultations
Marketing to Children in Canada

• In 2016, $1.5 billion was spent on food advertising in Canada on the internet and television (~ 20% of all ads on TV and 14% of internet advertising) \(^1\)

• Food marketing to children is extensive; most is for “unhealthy” food.

• Canadian studies show:
  – children view ~ 3-7 food or beverage ads / hour on TV; \(^2\) majority of advertised products (65-80%) not in line with dietary guidance. \(^3, 4, 5, 6\)
  – > 54 million food and beverage ads appeared on children’s preferred websites (June 2015–May 2016); \(^7\) over 90% of ads were for food or beverages excessive in fat, sodium or free sugars.
Current Approaches in Canada

The *Quebec Consumer Protection Act*

- Introduced in 1980
- Through the *Consumer Protection Act*, Quebec imposes restrictions on the commercial advertising of *all goods and services* to children under the age of 13.
  - **Aim**: protect children, who are particularly vulnerable and impressionable, from effects of advertising

*Canadian Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CAI)*

- Introduced in 2007; *industry-led and voluntary*
- Member companies pledge to not advertise to children under 12 OR advertise only foods that meet CAI Uniform Nutrition Criteria
Senate Bill S-228: The Child Health Protection Act

- Senator Greene Raine introduced Bill S-228 – the Child Health Protection Act – in the Senate in September 2016
- Aims to protect children’s health by prohibiting the advertising of “unhealthy” food to children under 13
- Provides the Government with the authority to introduce regulations to restrict the marketing of unhealthy food and beverages to children
- Bill S-228 has passed Third Reading in the House of Commons in September and is back in the Senate for concurrence
• Input from all stakeholders helped inform the Government’s approach
Development of Health Canada’s Proposed Policy Approach

Define foods that would be subject to advertising restrictions

Determine if an advertisement is primarily directed at children

Define exemptions such as sponsorship of children’s sporting activities

*Where applicable, Quebec’s model helped inform Health Canada’s proposal*

**INFORMED BY:**
- Consultation feedback
- Expert advice
- The latest scientific evidence
Foods that would not be allowed to be advertised to children

Health Canada is proposing to define food that would be subject to advertising restrictions as:

- food with added sodium, added fat and/or free sugars\(^1\) and where the total sodium, total saturated fats and/or total sugars, respectively, exceeds prescribed thresholds\(^2\); OR
- food with a front-of-package nutrition symbol.

Foods that are encouraged by Health Canada’s dietary guidance to be eaten regularly would not be impacted by advertising restrictions.

\(^1\) Free sugars include sugars, except those naturally present in whole or cut fruits; whole or cut vegetables; dairy products; grains; legumes; or nuts and seeds.

\(^2\) Proposed thresholds equivalent to the thresholds for the nutrient content claims “low in sodium”, “low in saturated fatty acids”, and “low in sugars”.
The impact of marketing to children is a result of both exposure to unhealthy food ads and the power of the techniques used.

The proposed approach addresses both by considering three primary factors:

1) Settings: include places, events or activities
2) Medium: include Internet, TV, films, print, websites and digital applications
3) Advertising techniques: include a wide range of powerful mechanisms that appeal to children
Sponsorship of Children’s Sporting Activities

Health Canada proposes to exempt, subject to conditions, children’s sport sponsorship.

Balances the physical, mental and social benefits children get from participating in sports with the negative effects of unhealthy food advertising.

Conditions:

- Techniques designed to appeal to children under 13 (e.g., mascots, product giveaways, prizes, etc.) could be prohibited.
The Need for Monitoring

• Monitoring will be a critical element of successful implementation of marketing regulations
• The House of Commons Committee studying the Bill adopted an amendment to Bill S-228 to introduce a five-year mandatory review of the impact of the legislation by Parliament.
  • Focus on definition of “children”; does age limit of under 13 result in increased advertising to teenagers?
• Robust monitoring approach will be needed to inform Parliamentary review
Monitoring Strategy

- Health Canada is developing a monitoring strategy
  - will build on international practices
  - be informed by experts (researchers, other stakeholders)
  - scope includes conditions both covered and not covered in regulations (e.g., teenagers, exemptions)

**INFORMED BY:**

- Existing frameworks, recommendations, protocols, e.g., WHO, Nordic Framework, INFORMAS
- Evidence of marketing practices and their impact on children and youth
- Experts
Next Steps

• Refine policy approach and regulatory proposal based on further evidence development and what we have heard through consultations
• Seek feedback on detailed regulatory proposal through *Canada Gazette*, Part I
• Continue to develop monitoring strategy
Thank You!
References


