

## WHO recommends stronger policies to protect children from the harmful impact of food marketing



The World Health Organization (WHO) has released a new guideline on policies to protect children from the harmful impact of food marketing.

The guideline recommends countries implement comprehensive mandatory policies to protect children of all ages from the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages that are high in saturated fatty acids, *trans*-fatty acids, free sugars and/or salt (HFSS).

More than 10 years after Member States endorsed WHO's [recommendations](#) on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children in 2010, children continue to be exposed to powerful marketing of HFSS foods and non-alcoholic beverages, consumption of which is associated with negative health effects.

The updated recommendation is based on the findings of reviews of recent evidence, including how exposure to and the power of food marketing [affects](#) children's health, eating behaviours, and food-related attitudes and beliefs. In short, food marketing remains a threat to public health and continues to negatively [affect](#) children's food choices, intended choices and their dietary intake. It also negatively influences the development of children's norms about food consumption.

The recommendation is also based on a systematic review of the evidence on [policies](#) to restrict food marketing, including on [contextual factors](#).

### Policies to restrict food marketing

Policies to restrict food marketing suggests are shown to be most effective if they: are mandatory; protect children of all ages; use a government-led nutrient profile model to classify foods to be restricted from marketing; and are sufficiently comprehensive to minimize the risk of migration of marketing to other age groups, other spaces within the same medium or to other media, including digital spaces.

'Restricting the power of food marketing to persuade' is also impactful, which involves limiting the use of cartoons or techniques that appeal to children, such as including toys with products, advertising with songs, and celebrity endorsements.

Considering this evidence, WHO now recommends mandatory regulation of marketing of HFSS foods and non-alcoholic beverages, having previously made more allowances for a range of policy approaches.

Another change is the guideline's use of the definition of a child from the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to be unequivocal that policies should protect all children. Two other updates are

recommendations for: countries to use a nutrient profile model, which governments lead the development of; and adopting policies comprehensive enough to minimize intra and inter-medium migration to avoid restrictions on marketing in regulated channels or settings.

### **Unhealthy dietary choices**

“Aggressive and pervasive marketing of foods and beverages high in fats, sugars and salt to children is responsible for unhealthy dietary choices,” says Dr Francesco Branca, Director of the Department of Nutrition and Food Safety of WHO.

“Calls to responsible marketing practices have not had a meaningful impact. Governments should establish strong and comprehensive regulations.”

Policy decisions based on this guideline should be adapted to the local contexts of WHO regions and Member States. Adoption of the recommendation and adaptation to country contexts require local consultations, with mechanisms in place to safeguard public health policy-making from undue influence by real, perceived or potential conflicts of interest.

Policies to protect children from the harmful impact of food marketing are best implemented as part of a comprehensive policy approach to create enabling and supportive food environments.

Consequently, this guideline is part of a suite of forthcoming guidelines on food environment policies. All of these guidelines aim to support governments in creating healthy food environments to facilitate healthy dietary decisions, establish lifelong healthy eating habits, improve dietary quality and decrease the risk of noncommunicable diseases worldwide. **-who.int/news, July 3, 2023**