



*World Consumer Rights Day 2015:
Consumers Rights to Healthy Food*

Briefing no. 5

Healthy Food In Schools

About Consumers International

Established in 1960, CI is the world federation of consumer rights groups. Our goal is to ensure that consumer rights can never be ignored. With over 240 Member organisations spanning 120 countries, we serve as the only independent and authoritative global voice for consumer rights. We are a registered UK charity.

As part of a package of measures required to protect and promote healthy diets CI is calling for:

- ***schools to be free from unhealthy food marketing;***
- ***the provision of safe, free drinking water in all schools;***
- ***rules on nutritional content of food sold in canteens, vending machines etc;***
- ***purchasing and commissioning activities to promote the consumption of healthier foods and limit the consumption of unhealthy foods.***

Obesity in children

The number of overweight and obese children is rising, particularly in low and middle income countries.

Unhealthy diets now rank above tobacco as a global cause of preventable non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Worldwide obesity has nearly doubled since 1980. The number of overweight or obese children under 5 increased from 32 million globally in 1990 to 42 million in 2013. ¹ Seventy million young children will be overweight or obese by 2025 if current trends continue. ² Children who are overweight or obese are at greater risk of asthma, high blood pressure, musculoskeletal disorders, fatty liver disease, insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes. ³ They are more likely to be obese in later life and are more at risk of developing other health problems. ⁴

The vast majority of overweight or obese children live in low and middle income countries, where the rate of increase has been more than 30% higher than that of high income countries. ⁵ In the WHO African Region alone the number of overweight or obese children increased from 4 to 9 million between 1990 and 2013. ⁶

Food marketing to children in schools

There is a well-established connection between food marketing and children's food preferences, purchase requests and consumption patterns. ⁷ Television is still the predominant media, but techniques now also include product placement via toys, educational materials, songs, and movies; character licensing and celebrity endorsements; word of mouth campaigns, text messages, website, and 'advergames.'

Huge sums are spent each year on advertising budgets - US fast food restaurants alone [spent \\$4.6bn on advertising to children and teens](#) in 2012⁸ Most of the television food advertising to which children are exposed is for foods high in energy sugar, salt or fat.⁹

^{1,2,3,4,5,6} WHO (n.d) *Facts & figures on childhood obesity*[online], WHO. Available at: <http://www.who.int/end-childhood-obesity/facts/en/>, [Accessed 06.02.2015]

⁷ Story, M. & French, S. (2004), Food Advertising and Marketing Directed at Children and Adolescents in the US, *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 1(3)

⁸ Harris, J. et al(2013) *Fast Food FACTS 2013*, Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity

⁹ Kelly B, Halford JCG, Boyland EJ, et al. Television Food Advertising to Children: A Global Perspective. *American Journal of Public Health*2010;100(9):1730-1736. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2009.179267

The types of marketing strategies used in schools include direct marketing (eg poster advertisements), indirect marketing (eg sponsorship of school materials) and product sales (eg vending machines and 'tuck shops')

The significance of the impact of marketing on children's diets has been recognised by the World Health Assembly (WHA) and in 2010 the World Health Organization (WHO) produced a *Set of Recommendations* urging member states to address the exposure and power of marketing foods to children.¹⁰

Recommendation 5 states,

"Settings where children gather should be free from all forms of marketing of foods high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars, or salt. Such settings include, but are not limited to, nurseries, playgrounds, family and child clinics and paediatric services and during any sporting and cultural activities that are held on these premises."



Implementation of the WHO *Recommendations* was a key policy action contained in the WHO Global Action Plan 2013–2020 for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs), which was endorsed by the World Health Assembly in May 2013. However most governments have yet to implement these *Recommendations*.

Nutritional standards

The quality of food provided in schools can have significant impact on a child's health and development.

Research has shown that eating a healthy school meal improves children's concentration during afternoon lessons and can have a positive impact on classroom behaviour.¹¹



As well as the food and beverages sold in canteens young people are often exposed to unhealthy products via vending machines and tuck shops. Vending machines can be a source of income for schools that are under financial pressure, and so there is a conflict between raising income and protecting students from unhealthy food.¹²

What is CI calling for?

CI is campaigning for a Global Convention to protect and promote healthy diets¹³, using a similar mechanism to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. A Global Convention would commit governments to a package of policy measures designed to help consumers eat more healthily. This would include: restrictions on food marketing to children; nutrition labelling; provision of better food in schools and public institutions and

¹⁰ World Health Organization (2010) *Set of recommendations on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children*. Available at: <http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/publications/recsmarketing/en/>

¹¹ Food for Life Partnership (2010) *Return of the turkey twizzler? How cost cuts threaten the school food revolution* [online], FFLP. Available at: <http://www.foodforlife.org.uk/~media/files/policyreports/return-of-the-turkey-twizzler.pdf> [Accessed 06.02.15]

¹² National Union of Teachers, UK (2004) *Briefing on schools' role in promoting child health and combating commercialisation*, NUT

¹³ Consumers International and World Obesity Federation, (2014) *Recommendations Towards a Global Convention to Protect and Promote Healthy Diets* [online]. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/nkafurp>

consideration of fiscal tools to promote healthier eating. A Global Convention should also include measures to make schools healthier food environments for children including:

- **Controls on advertising, promotion and sponsorship to children** in order to protect children from exposure to the promotion of unhealthy food and beverage products, in accordance with the WHO's Recommendations on the Marketing of Foods and Non-alcoholic Beverages to Children.
- **Application of nutrition and food based standards for food service operations catering to schools, hospitals and public institutions including:**
 - a) the application of national nutrition and food-based standards in schools and educational establishments;
 - b) the provision of and easy access to safe, free drinking water;
 - c) purchasing and commissioning activities to promote consumption of healthy foods and limit consumption of unhealthy foods.

Examples of policies that restrict marketing of junk food to children or establish nutritional or food-based standards for schools

Brazil

Brazil passed a resolution in April 2014 based on the Federal Constitution, the Statute of Children and Adolescents and the Consumer Defense Code in which all types of publicity directed towards children are considered abusive and therefore illegal. It covers all types of media and explicitly mentions use of children's songs, celebrities or characters that appeal to children, the use of collectibles or toys and competitions with activities or games for children. The public body that passed the resolution, CONADA (National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents), does not have the means to impose sanctions, but it adds an essential aspect to the legal framework already available in Brazil by setting clear definitions of what abusive advertising means.¹⁴

Chile

A law approved by the Chilean government in 2012 on the 'Nutritional Composition of Food and Advertising (Ley 20, 606)' includes restrictions on advertising directed to children under 14 of foods in what it has defined as the 'excess' category' – this is defined as certain levels of energy, saturated fats, sugar and sodium content. The law covers advertising of such foods in schools. It is scheduled to be implemented later in 2015.

UK

Last year (2014) the UK introduced a set of new, food-based standards for use in schools. There has been a regulation in place since 2007 in England that requires school to ensure that drinking water is provided free of charge at all times to registered pupils on school premises.

Mexico

¹⁴ www.consumersinternational.org/news-and-media/news/2014/04/advertising-to-children-now-technically-illegal-in-brazil/

In 2010, as part of the Acuerdo Nacional por la Salud Alimentaria (National Agreement for Healthy Food) the federal government (the Education Ministry and the Health Ministry) proposed a set of recommended Guidelines for Food and Beverages inside Schools. These guidelines demanded progressively stricter controls over the food being sold in schools.

In 2013, as part of the National Strategy against Overweight, Obesity and Diabetes, the government passed legislation on food and beverage marketing in schools. The situation is different to some countries in that Mexican children do not tend to have a big meal at school, so the regulation covers snacks and food sold during breaks. All sugar-sweetened beverages are banned, and between Monday and Thursday only fruit, vegetables, whole grain products and water can be sold. On Fridays processed food products can be sold but only those containing very low levels of sugar, salt and fat.

Possible actions to promote WCRD2015 and our call for a Global Convention

1. Conduct a billboard survey around a number of schools, covering a uniform radius, say 100 metres from the school gates. Count the adverts that you see and note what products are being categorised. Are they for healthy or unhealthy food? It may be easiest to determine this according to the categories of products that you see advertised, for instance sugary drinks, confectionary or fast food. See CI's Junk Food Generation Toolkit for tips on this kind of survey or, for more technical guidance, the CI Manual for monitoring food marketing to children. Details of both are listed under Further Reading.
2. If you have permission, conduct a survey inside a number of schools to investigate whether children are being exposed to junk food marketing or promotion. If access to a school or schools is not possible, consider interviewing children with their parents. Has a food company sponsored any sports equipment? Are there vending machines with food or beverage branding on them? Are there adverts for junk food or soda up around the school? In the dining hall, has the school agreed to stock certain brands of soda?
3. Are there nutrition and food-based standards in your country and are they applied to schools? How does your country compare with other countries in your region?
4. Are there legal requirements in your country to make free, clean water available to children at all times during the school day? If not, undertake some research into what children are drinking – is it water that they bring themselves? Is it sugary beverages?



Further reading

From CI

Manual for monitoring food marketing to children

This manual is a step-by-step guide designed to support governments and civil society in monitoring the extent and nature of food marketing to children in their national context. It is accompanied by a 'coding form' which can be used to record and analyse the data collected during monitoring. It includes a section on monitoring marketing in schools. Available on CI website in English, Spanish and French.

<http://www.consumersinternational.org/news-and-media/resource-zone/coding-form-manual-for-monitoring-the-marketing-of-food-and-non-alcoholic-beverages-to-children/>

Junkfood Generation Toolkit

CI produced this practical guide to running a national campaign on the marketing of energy-dense, nutrient-poor food and drinks to children in 2011.

It contains lots of useful, practical advice on campaigning, including sections on identifying allies and campaign opportunities, how to gather evidence and how to launch your campaign.

Available on the CI website in English and Spanish. <http://www.consumersinternational.org/news-and-media/resource-zone/junk-food-generation-toolkit/>



Other sources

World Cancer Research Fund International Nourishing Framework

All the policy examples provided here are from the WCRF site. For these and more:

<http://www.wcrf.org/int/policy/nourishing-framework/restrict-food-marketing>