

Chile seeks to fight obesity with new food labeling law

June 27 2016, by Eva Vergara And Luis Andres Henao



In this June 22, 2016 photo, toys that come with Happy Meals are showcased at a McDonald's restaurant in Santiago, Chile. Chile seeks to fight one of the world's highest rates of childhood obesity with a new food labeling law. The law came into force Monday, June 27, 2016. McDonald's modified its Happy Meal to follow the law that experts say will be one of the most demanding of its kind. (AP Photo/Esteban Felix)

Chile implemented a new food labeling law Monday in hopes of

lowering the country's childhood obesity rate, which is one of the highest in the world.

The Health Ministry has ordered labels to be placed on food that is high in sugar, calories, sodium or saturated fat. It also bans the sale of any of those products in schools as well as advertisements for them that target children under age 14.

Such foods also cannot be sold with a toy under the law, which experts say will be one of the strictest of its kind.

"This will be the most demanding law in the world as it follows a series of recommendation by the World Health Organization regarding the quantity of certain substances," Paloma Cuchi, WHO's regional representative, told The Associated Press.

"When it's fully implemented it will be the first one that will be on the level recommended by the WHO for substances like sugar, salt and fats."

McDonald's has modified its children's meals in Chile by reducing the amount of salt, sugar and saturated fats to meet the law's nutritional requirements, said Silvina Seiguer, head of McDonald's corporate communications for South America. McDonald's will continue to include toys with those meals because its changes follow the new law, Seiguer said.

The law has faced opposition. Italy's Ferrero Group recently threatened to take legal action against Chile to protect its Kinder Surprise chocolate-shelled eggs beloved by children for the small toy inside. Ferrero did not respond to multiple email and phone messages seeking comment.

Hunger has been greatly reduced in Latin America and the Caribbean, but obesity has doubled in the region in the past decade, to almost 62

percent of adults and 26 percent of young people. Countries like Chile and Mexico are nearing the overweight and obesity levels of the United States, WHO says.

In Chile, the Health Ministry says five of every 10 children are overweight and one of every 11 deaths is linked to obesity.

The Chilean law was approved in 2012, but its regulations were not finalized until last year.

Under the new rules, every 100 grams of solid food can have a maximum of 275 calories, 400 milligrams of salt, 10 grams of sugar and 4 grams of saturated fats. Products that exceed the limits must carry a black label with large letters warning of that fact, such as "High in fats," for example.

Small businesses will have up to 36 months to fully comply, but had to begin modifying their products starting Monday. Those who fail to follow the new legislation could be fined.

"There are some people that are refusing to take these products because of the labels," said Sofia Rumpf, who owns a candy store in downtown Santiago. "Others who used to buy chocolate are now saying that they're not going to give them as gifts because they don't want to harm anyone."

Some countries in the European Union as well as Mexico and Ecuador follow a similar labeling system but with varying maximum levels.

The Chilean law "is a pioneer worldwide" because it includes the protection of schools, it has frontal labeling on food and it bans advertising of the products to children, said Lorena Rodriguez, head of the nutrition and health department within the Health Ministry.

Not everyone agrees with the benefits of the [law](#). "I really liked the candy that has the toys," 10-year-old Pablo Araya said on his way to school. "I collect the cars that come with the Kinder Surprise. I will miss it."

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