

Action needed now on unhealthy marketing to kids

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Governments and food companies globally are failing to act on protecting children from the marketing of unhealthy food, according to a new study.

The study published in the World Health Organisation Bulletin this month, reviewed the progress by countries and the top 22 global food companies on enacting the 2010 WHO recommendations on restricting unhealthy food and beverage marketing to [children](#).

It found that no country or company has fully implemented the recommendations and that progress in general was very slow and patchy.

Professor Boyd Swinburn from the University of Auckland who was one of the study authors says, "Despite all the reports, resolutions and recommendations, progress on protecting children from marketing of the very products which are driving the [childhood obesity epidemic](#) has been painfully slow."

"It is very disturbing that despite all the fine commitments, most governments around the world seem reluctant to restrict the food industry's exploitation of children in this way," he says. "I am afraid it speaks volumes about the power that the food and advertising industries have over governments, even as [childhood obesity](#) continues to rise."

Professor Swinburn says that in New Zealand, the government has yet to shift from a hands off approach to an active approach. At the moment,

the advertising industry just makes its own rules on [food marketing](#) to children.

"There is no evidence that industry self-regulation has any impact on reducing the exposure of children to junk food marketing," he says.

"The sophistication of marketing techniques and the use of social media means that exposure is almost certainly increasing."

The study found that some countries were using legislation to curb marketing and it reiterated the recommendations of the recent WHO Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity that this was a top priority for governments.

In New Zealand, the Advertising Standards Authority is now reviewing the self-regulatory codes on food marketing to children and it recently received more than 90 submissions to the review.

The review panel is chaired by Sir Bruce Robertson, (a former Court of Appeal Judge), and it is expected to report in September.

In one submission, a group of more than 70 health professors laid out what was needed to protect New Zealand children—who have the third highest obesity rates in the industrialised world—from marketing of unhealthy foods.

The recommendations included:

- Upholding the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including defining children as, up to the age of 18 years
- Government regulation alongside industry self-regulation to ensure that the restrictions are meaningful and can be enforced
- All forms of marketing are covered including social media,

internet and sponsorship

- A recognised nutrient profile system, such as the one developed by WHO, is used to define [unhealthy foods](#)

Professor Swinburn says, "Health experts and children's advocates will be looking for the ASA review to greatly strengthen the self-regulatory codes. Many submissions called for the government to bring in regulations as well so that children's health is not left in the hands of the food and advertising industries."

"Our study showed that internationally there is a real leadership vacuum in this area and there is no reason that New Zealand could not be one of those leaders."

Provided by University of Auckland

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