

# Food industry 'shares the blame' for severity of COVID-19, argue experts

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The food industry shares the blame not only for the obesity pandemic but also for the severity of covid-19 disease and its devastating consequences, argue experts in *The BMJ* today.

Researchers at Queen Mary University of London say coronavirus has made tackling the obesity pandemic even more urgent, and they call on [food industries](#) around the world to immediately stop promoting, and governments to force reformulation of, [unhealthy foods](#) and drinks.

Levels of overweight and obesity have now reached 65-70% in UK and US adult populations. Obesity is a major cause of high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, [heart disease](#), stroke, and cancer, and increasing evidence also suggests that obesity is an [independent risk factor](#) for [severe illness](#) and death from covid-19.

The covid-19 outbreak seems to be yet one more health problem exacerbated by the obesity pandemic, explain the authors.

For instance, an increase in food poverty, disruptions to supply chains, and panic buying during the covid-19 pandemic may have limited access to fresh foods, "thus tilting the balance towards a greater consumption of highly processed foods and those with long shelf lives that are usually high in salt, sugar, and saturated fat."

What's more, they argue that since the start of the covid-19 pandemic the food industry has used the outbreak as a marketing opportunity (for example, by offering half a million "smiles" in the form of doughnuts to NHS staff).

And despite some progress, such as taxes on [sugary drinks](#), governments have done too little, they add.

"Reducing salt, sugar, and saturated fat across the board would improve the diet of the entire population and bring even greater benefits for people who are most socially deprived," they say. "The toll of morbidity and mortality from covid-19 has made this more apparent and more urgent than ever."

**More information:** Editorial: Obesity and covid-19: the role of the food industry? *The BMJ* [DOI: 10.1136/bmj.m2237](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m2237)

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