**The 2nd Global NCD Alliance Forum** was held 9-11 December 2017 in Sharjah, UAE. This year’s theme was “Stepping up the pace on NCDs: making 2018 count.”

**NEW:** The **Healthy Caribbean Coalition** has just issued a policy brief that highlights the relationship between trade and NCDs in the region. The brief also explores the role that trade policy can play in supporting the prevention and control NCDs.

**NEW:** The International Diabetes Federation has just issued an online version of the eighth edition of its **Diabetes Atlas**. The Atlas is a global reference report that estimates diabetes prevalence and its related burden worldwide.

**NEW:** The Third UN High-Level Meeting on NCDs will take place in 2018. The Preparatory Documents have been released in advance.

**NEW:** The WHO has committed to establish an Independent High-level Global Commission on Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs). The announcement came at the 64th Session of WHO’s Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean that was held in Islamabad, 9-12 October.

**NEW:** World Cancer Day will be held on 4 February 2018.

**For other updates and upcoming events, please see the NCD Alliance news and events sites:** [http://www.ncdalliance.org/news-events](http://www.ncdalliance.org/news-events).

---

**NCD Prevention and Control versus Industry Marketing:**

**Unhealthy Foods**

Industry marketing, advertising, promotion, and sponsorship *can contribute to the consumption of unhealthy foods and beverages* by inaccurately portraying these products as healthy, fun, and a necessary part of an active and modern social life. By “unhealthy food and beverages,” we mean foods and drinks that are both high in calories, fat, salt, and/or sugar and low in nutrients. They include heavily processed items that are full of chemicals, such as junk food and sugary beverages (soft drinks, artificial juices, and energy drinks). These are the foods that we often find in fast food outlets, in corner stores, and in chain restaurants.

Healthy foods, by contrast, are those that contain plenty of nutrients and are not highly processed. They are generally the stuff of traditional diets: locally sourced whole grains, pulses, beans and legumes, nuts, herbs, fresh fruit and vegetables, and traditionally produced dairy products such as yoghurts and cheeses.

Unhealthy diet is one of the four major causes of NCDs, along with tobacco and alcohol consumption and lack of sufficient physical activity. The high prevalence of premature and largely preventable death and disability due to NCDs is, in turn, a major cause of poverty and poses significant barriers to economic and social development worldwide. Research and anecdotal evidence also links poor nutritional habits in children to poor learning outcomes and to decreased strength and attention spans. While tobacco advertising is widely restricted as a critical component of many countries’ national tobacco control strategies, we still have a long way to go to limit the promotion of unhealthy foods and beverages, especially to children.

This issue of the NCD and poverty newsletter focuses on the marketing of unhealthy food and beverages, and provides examples of what some countries are doing to counter its harmful effects. Some of the information in this report comes from the 2016 report **Carbonating the World**, issued by the Center for Science in the Public Interest.
What is the Problem with Advertising Unhealthy Food?

At home, watching TV or using social media to communicate with friends. On the street, walking past billboards and store signs. In public places like parks, sitting under large, brightly coloured signs. In school, wearing clothes, learning from textbooks, arriving in buses, signing yearbooks, or grabbing a snack from a vending machine. We constantly find ourselves face-to-face with advertising that entices us to eat unhealthy foods. There are even cartoon videos that claim to promote healthy food but whose message reinforces the idea that junk foods are delicious and more desirable than healthier alternatives. The marketing of unhealthy food is particularly concerning when it targets young children who cannot distinguish between advertising and programming. A recent Canadian study showed that children under the age of eleven see more than 25 million online junk food ads each year on the internet alone. In fact, large food companies spend about two billion dollars annually on advertising that specifically targets children and teenagers. How are parents to help their children make healthy food choices in this environment? How are they to convince their children that minimally-processed, colourful, fresh, and healthy foods taste great, when they are regularly bombarded with ads that encourage them to eat junk food?

To make the issue even more challenging, unhealthy food marketing involves much more than just direct, easy-to-recognize billboards and television/online/magazine advertisements. It includes subtle product placements in television and online programmes, in movies, in video games, and in contests. MTV in India, for example, partners with PepsiCo, while the judges in Vietnam’s Got Talent programme regularly drink from cups that advertise Pepsi and promote other junk food products. It includes promotional activities, such as team and event sponsorships. Coca-Cola and McDonald’s are major sponsors of the Olympics and the World Cup, and of children’s events associated with them. Coca-Cola also sponsors 35 national football teams from around the world, plus the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), the Confederación Sudamericana de Fútbol (CONMEBOL), the Africa Cup of Nations (CAF), the Copa Coca-Cola for kids in Latin America, and numerous youth cups and sports events.

Junk food companies also use other tactics to advertise their products. They make well-known (Western) products available everywhere, and adapt or reformulate those products to appeal to local markets in low- and middle-income countries. They maximize the number of neighbourhood outlets selling their products. They design packages so that they appear to support and be a key part of national and local celebrations. They also use gimmicks, such as contests and sweepstakes that require the collection of proofs of purchase to enter, or that tie sale prices to particular package sizes. Social media, such as Facebook, are also powerful marketing tools. Coca-Cola’s Facebook page has more than 93 million likes.

The basic fact is that the advertising of sugary drinks and junk food is ubiquitous. The question is, what can we do about it?
Government Action Against Unhealthy Food Advertising

Government officials often want to know who else is already taking action against unhealthy food advertising before they will consider doing so in their own countries. Here is just a sample of what is already being done:

**Canada:** The province of Quebec passed a law in 1980 that restricts junk food marketing to kids. It was the first of its kind, banning junk food marketing aimed at children under the age of 13 in print and electronic media. Evidence suggests that it has worked to reduce junk food consumption in that province. Health Canada (the national ministry of health) is currently proposing nationwide restrictions on television and online ads for junk food, as well as advertising in places where children spend time, like schools and amusement parks.

**Chile:** Chilean law bans the advertising of foods high in calories, saturated fat, sugar, and sodium to children under the age of 14. The regulation applies to television programs, websites, radios, and magazines directed at children or whose audience contains at least 20 percent children. These food items may not be marketed in schools. Promotional strategies, such as the use of cartoons and toys, are also prohibited.

**France:** Rather than restricting junk food advertising, French authorities traditionally required that advertisements for products that contain added fats, sweeteners, or sodium contain a message that explains dietary principles. However, the Senate recently adopted a legislative proposal, which will go into effect 1 January 2018, to ban commercial advertising 15 minutes before and after TV programs for children under 12 on public broadcasting. The ban will also apply to the websites of public broadcasters that offer programs designed for children under 12.

**Ireland:** Foods high in fats, sugar, and sodium are banned from advertising, sponsorship, teleshopping, and product placement in television and radio programs where more than 50 percent of the audience is under 18 years old. Any advertising targeting children under 18 cannot include celebrities, and those directed to children under 13 cannot include health claims or use licensed characters. Advertisements for unhealthy foods may represent a maximum of 25 percent of all paid advertising on all channels.

**Mexico:** Mexican children see more junk food advertising than those in any other country. The Ministry of Health has taken a series of steps to limit child exposure to unhealthy food marketing, beginning with restricting advertising of certain foods and sweetened beverages. Restrictions apply to television programs with more than 35 percent of the audience under 13 years old, aired between 2:30 pm and 7:30 pm on weekdays and 7:00 am and 7:30 pm on weekends. In July 2014, the government extended the restriction to cinematic films.

**Norway:** The Norwegian Broadcasting Act of 1992 restricts broadcast advertising directed specifically to children. In 2013, industry and government took a step further: companies agreed to a self-regulated ban on all types of marketing of unhealthy foods and drinks to children under the age of 16. Norway also leads a World Health Organization network of 28 countries that seeks to reduce marketing pressures on children.

**Taiwan:** In January 2016, the Taiwaneese government implemented limits on unhealthy food advertising that targets children under the age of 12. Television channels for children cannot broadcast advertisements for foods that exceed set fat, sodium, and sugar content limits between 5pm and 9 pm. Food marketers cannot promote their products with free toys at restaurants.

**UK:** The United Kingdom has expanded its decade-old ban on junk food advertising across children’s media to include online and social media. As of 1 July 2017, the new rules ban the advertisement of food and beverages that are high in fat, salt, or sugar in all non-broadcast media that targets those under the age of 16.
Countering Unhealthy Food and Beverage Advertising in Nepal and Vietnam

A study conducted in Nepal at the Tribhuvan University in 2009 revealed that television advertising was one of the key factors behind the consumption of unhealthy foods in Nepal. Television—and the programs (and advertisements) broadcast by hundreds of cable network and satellite companies—is widely available to all classes of people in the country. A follow-up rapid assessment study conducted by the Resource Centre for Primary Health Care (RECPHEC) in 2013 found that junk foods represented about one-quarter of all television ads aired in Nepal. While adult-oriented channels broadcasted relatively few junk food advertisements, almost half of the advertising on channels such as Nickelodeon that target children was for these unhealthy products. Many of the ads on the child-focused channels used colourful animated videos, and all of the ads contained misleading information suggesting that the products were healthy. Based on this study, RECPHEC made several recommendations to the Nepalese government, including the revival of the Advertisement Policy to regulate junk food advertising (and to ban such advertising that targets children) and the revision of the Consumer Protection Act to protect viewers from false or misleading advertising.

On 4 August 2012, the government announced a ban on the inclusion of pre-packaged foods such as instant noodles, biscuits, chips, and soft drinks in school-based lunch programs. In the absence of guidelines and monitoring, however, the ban has not yet been adequately implemented. RECPHEC’s ongoing advocacy efforts appear to be paying off, though. Its draft guidelines for regulating junk food advertising are now in the hands of the Press Council of Nepal, an autonomous and independent media regulatory body set up by the Government of Nepal to oversee press freedom and responsibility. While the Council has insisted on using the term "food products" rather than "junk food," the guidelines will soon move to the Supreme Court for approval and policy development. We watch these developments with interest!

HealthBridge Vietnam and the Hanoi School of Public Health have focused their efforts on including stronger and more enforceable advertisement restrictions in Vietnam’s national Alcohol Control Law. Like junk food products marketing, advertisements for alcoholic products can be found almost everywhere: on television, on the internet, at social and sporting events, on in-store displays, in movies and music videos, on billboards, on clothing and personal use products, and so on. These advertisements promote alcoholic beverages as healthy, nutritious drinks that families should use. They also often target young people with messages that link alcohol consumption with improved social and professional lives, national pride, and athleticism. Although Vietnam already has some alcohol advertising limitations in place, they are weakly enforced and largely ignored. The Ministry of Health plans to include the new Alcohol Control Law in the 2018 legislative agenda of the National Assembly. We will watch for progress!
What Can I Do?

The Center for Science in the Public Interest’s 2016 report *Carbonating the World* contains a long list of suggestions for action against unhealthy food consumption that can be taken by governments, the World Health Organization, beverage companies, restaurants, and civil society organizations. Specifically in terms of advertising, the report recommends protecting children by barring the advertisement and sale of unhealthy foods in schools and across all media platforms (including the Internet, mobile media, and packaging) that are directed at children. Warning labels should appear on all pre-packaged food containers and in advertisements for those products. The WHO should hold consultations on the development of a treaty or non-binding international legal instrument to establish global standards on the labeling and marketing of unhealthy foods. Civil society organizations should discourage athletes, celebrities, and sports organizations from promoting and accepting sponsorships from the producers and marketers of unhealthy food products.

Several other organizations also provide helpful information:

**On food marketing in schools:** Food Marketing Workgroup

ChangeLab Solutions

**On food marketing to children:** Children’s Food Campaign

Stop Marketing to Kids Coalition

The Coalition on Food Advertising to Children (CFAC)

Parents Jury

**On food mis-advertising:** Food Mythbusters

**On counter-marketing:** Food Active

---

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Do you have any announcements that you would like to share with the network? Let us know by sending an email to Lori Jones, ljones@healthbridge.ca

We look forward to your contributions and feedback!