

Code on food marketing to children needs accepted rating

9 September 2016

Protecting New Zealand children from exposure to the marketing of unhealthy foods needs a world standard food rating system, according to new research from the University of Auckland.

A study published today [Sept 9] in the *New Zealand Medical Journal*, compared three accepted nutrient profiling systems and found that the World Health Organization Europe's model was the most effective.

"This World Health Organization system needs to underpin the Advertising Standards Authority's revised Children's Code for Advertising Food," says lead author Professor Cliona Ni Mhurchu from the National Institute for Health Innovation at the University of Auckland.

"Promotion of unhealthy foods and drinks is a significant, modifiable risk factor for child obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases," she says. "The study was to identify the best system to protect New Zealand children from exposure to the marketing of unhealthy foods and drinks."

The Advertising Standards Authority is currently reviewing the code for advertising food to children and called for submissions in February this year. The review is expected to deliver a final recommendation in September.

The three nutrient profiling systems compared in the study were the Health Star Rating (HSR), the Ministry of Health Food and Beverage Classification System (FBCS), and the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe Nutrient Profiling Model.

"Under any of the three nutrient profiling systems, about a third (29-39 percent) of New Zealand packaged foods would be permitted to be marketed to children," says Professor Ni Mhurchu.

"Our study shows that the WHO Model restricts

marketing of unhealthy foods more effectively than the other two systems," she says. "The HSR and FBCS systems would permit marketing of a number of food products of concern, particularly high-sugar breakfast cereals, fruit juices and ready meals."

The study examined 13,066 packaged foods from the 2014 New Zealand Nutritrack database and classified them as 'restricted' or 'not restricted' as per the WHO model; 'everyday/sometimes' or 'occasional' as per the FBCS model; and '

APA citation: Code on food marketing to children needs accepted rating (2016, September 9) retrieved 8 October 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-09-code-food-children.html>

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