

Not in front of the kids

Food companies and restaurants will no longer be able to advertise unhealthy food to children if proposed legislation is passed.



If the draft proposals are accepted, it will be plain fare for school children. (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

Draft guidelines, called the Criteria for the Commercial Marketing of Foods and Non-Alcoholic Beverages to Children, propose to stop the sale of any junk food or sweets to children at school tuck shops. The only drinks allowed to be sold at school would be milk, 100% fruit juice, and water. These drinks would have to be in 200ml to 250ml containers.

The guidelines are open for public comment until 29 August.

The proposed law plans to ban any branding or marketing of unhealthy foods at schools, meaning school signboards sponsored by Coke could become illegal.

Marketing food high in sugar, salt or fat to children over the internet or by electronic and phone messaging might also be banned.

Food labelling consultant Nigel Sunley slammed the draft legislation as being "unenforceable", charging that the regulators wanted to play "big brother".

The draft proposes:

- Vending machines at schools be unbranded;

- There be no marketing of any unhealthy foods at schools;
- No toys or gifts be given with unhealthy foods;
- No child actor, celebrity, cartoon character or film star be used to advertise unhealthy food; and
- No ads for unhealthy foods be on TV or radio from 6am to 9pm.

Teachers' union Naptosa president Basil Manuel said though he recognised the need to have healthier products in tuck shops, "schools are constantly going with a begging bowl to get sponsorship".

Fat fight

The Department of Health explained in the draft that the proposed law was aimed at combating increasing obesity among children, a worldwide problem.

The guidelines read: "The companies ... now offer ever larger burgers and portions, introduce more categories of sugared beverages."

Health directorate representative Antoinette Booyzen, who authored the report, said big industry had pledged to help reduce the impact of marketing of junk foods to children and that even if the law were not enforceable the attitude should be one of compliance.

Source: *The Times*, via I-Net Bridge

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