

news release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, contact:

Matt Gruenburg
(301) 652-1558
mgruenburg@burnesscommunications.com

Children and Teens Seeing Fewer Television Ads for Fruit Drinks, Regular Sodas and Sweets

But Youth of All Ages Seeing More Fast-Food Ads

Chicago, July 5, 2010 – Children and teens are seeing fewer television advertisements for fruit drinks, regular soda and sweets such as candy, cookies and pastries, according to a study published today in the *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*. However, youths of all ages are exposed to substantially more TV ads for fast-food restaurants.

The study follows self-regulation pledges by major food and beverage companies to eliminate unhealthy TV ads targeting children ages 11 and younger. Although recent changes in ad exposure indicate certain progress, the study concludes that continued monitoring of food advertising exposure is needed to further assess those corporate pledges.

Between 2003 and 2007, there was a 27 percent to 30 percent decrease in children's and teens' exposure to beverage ads. Exposure to heavily advertised sugar-sweetened fruit drinks and non-diet soft drinks showed decreases of 60 percent to 75 percent. In addition, exposure to ads for sweets declined, down 41 percent for children ages 2-5; 29 percent for children ages 6-11; and 12 percent for adolescents ages 12-17.

Furthermore, the study found that daily average exposure to total food advertising fell by 13.7 percent and 3.7 percent among ages 2-5 and 6-11, respectively. For ages 12-17, however, daily average exposure to food advertisements increased by nearly 4 percent.

“Our study shows substantial decreases in children's exposure to the most heavily advertised sugar-sweetened beverages, which is encouraging given the connection between the consumption of these beverages and increased risk for obesity and diabetes,” said lead researcher Lisa M. Powell, Ph.D., of the University of Illinois at Chicago and the Bridging the Gap national research program, which is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF).

“Still, not all the news is good,” Powell noted. “Children's and teens' exposure to fast-food ads increased substantially. And it seems advertisers are finding alternative ways to build brand loyalty among kids, such as increasing ads for diet soft drinks.”

Among the negative trends identified in fast-food advertising:

- Exposure to ads for fast-food restaurants increased for all age groups, up more than 20 percent for ages 12-17; more than 12 percent for ages 6-11; and nearly 5 percent for ages 2-5.
- By 2007, fast-food ads were the most frequently seen type of food ad among both children and teens.
- Among African-American youths, exposure to fast-food ads increased at more than twice the rate for their white counterparts: up almost 30 percent among ages 12-17; almost 16 percent among ages 6-12; and almost 7 percent for ages 2-11.

According to Powell and her co-authors, the high prevalence of fast-food ads aimed at younger audiences suggests the importance of branding. Children recognize brand logos at very young ages, and a recent study found that preschoolers prefer foods and beverages offered in branded packaging compared with plain packaging.

Industry leaders have publicly recognized the need to reform food advertisements targeting children. In 2006, the Council of Better Business Bureaus launched the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative, a pledge by major U.S. food manufacturers to shift the mix of advertising messaging directed to children under 12 to encourage healthier and/or better-for-you dietary choices and healthy lifestyles. Powell and her co-authors studied exposure to advertisements before and after the launch of this initiative. By December 2007, 13 companies had joined the initiative, and six companies had started to implement their pledges.

“Research shows that marketing has a strong influence on what children consume. Yet unhealthy foods are still marketed to kids,” said Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, M.D., M.B.A., RWJF president and CEO. “Restricting the marketing of unhealthy foods is one of the most powerful and cost-effective ways to change what children consume and reduce childhood obesity. Studies such as this one will help us evaluate the impact of industry self-regulation.”

Drawing from television ratings data licensed from Nielsen Media Research, the study assessed total annual exposure to food advertising during 2003, 2005 and 2007. Ratings data were assessed separately for three age groups: children ages 2-5 and 6-11 and adolescents ages 12-17. Ratings measure the percentage of households with televisions watching a program or advertisement over a specified time interval providing actual advertisement exposure.

Based on the television ratings, this study examined changes in children's and adolescents' total exposure to food advertising, not just exposure based on programming targeted to children.

#

About Bridging the Gap

Bridging the Gap is a nationally recognized research program dedicated to improving the understanding of how policies and environmental factors influence diet, physical activity and obesity among youth, as well as youth tobacco use. For more information, visit www.bridgingthegapresearch.org.

About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation focuses on the pressing health and health care issues facing our country. As the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans, the Foundation works with a diverse group of

organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, meaningful and timely change. For more than 35 years the Foundation has brought experience, commitment, and a rigorous, balanced approach to the problems that affect the health and health care of those it serves. Helping Americans lead healthier lives and get the care they need—the Foundation expects to make a difference in our lifetime. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org.