



**Under embargo until 06:00am Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2017**

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## **More than half of foods aimed at kids are unhealthy: research *Obesity experts call for stronger marketing regulations***

More than half of supermarket products marketed at kids are unhealthy, new research from the Obesity Policy Coalition (OPC) has revealed.

The OPC surveyed 186 packaged foods with cartoons or character promotions designed to attract children – 52 percent were classified as unhealthy by the Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) Nutrient Profiling Scoring Criterion calculator, which looks at the amount of energy and certain nutrients (eg saturated fat, sugars, sodium) present in the food.

Of the products containing cartoons or character promotions, the following were deemed unhealthy:

- 87% of kids' snack bars (26 of 30 products surveyed)
- 88% of kids' ice-creams and icy poles (30 of 34 products)
- 61% of cheese snacks (17 of 28 products)
- 32% of kids' breakfast cereals (13 of 41 products)
- 19% of kids' dairy snacks (10 of 53 products).

OPC Executive Manager Jane Martin said at a time when 27 per cent of Australian children are overweight or obese, it's shocking to see so many manufacturers directly targeting children with unhealthy food.

"It's extremely frustrating to see cartoons and animations being used to lure children and create pester power to push parents into buying unhealthy products for kids," Ms Martin said.

"Children are naturally drawn to fun, colourful characters on foods in the supermarket, and food companies are fully aware of this. They know that children have an incredible amount of power over what their parents buy<sup>1</sup>, and that's why Chile, a country that has been very progressive in obesity prevention, has restricted the use of cartoons on unhealthy food packaging.

"It's a shame that this powerful marketing tactic is not being used to sell more healthy products instead."

Among the unhealthy products which used cartoons to appeal to children were Kellogg's Frosties, which are 41 percent sugar, and Kraft Cheestik Sticks which contain 17.5g of saturated fat per 100g.

Food advertising in Australia is basically self-regulated, leaving food and advertising industries to make and break their own rules. Current industry-led regulations do not cover promotions on food packaging.

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“In Australia, the use of cartoons and characters on food and drink packaging is allowed, even under weak self-regulation, providing an unfettered marketing tool for food advertisers to target children,” Ms Martin said.

“We want food manufacturers to stop using animations to promote junk food in any way to kids and for the Federal Government to extend and strengthen existing junk food marketing regulations.

“Peak health bodies, such as the World Health Organization, recognise that restricting junk food marketing to children is a vital step in improving children’s diets and slowing our serious obesity problem. Urgent action is required to protect our children from the plethora of junk food promotion that surrounds them.”

**Sample of unhealthy products included in the study which use cartoons or characters to target children:**



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### About the research:

Between February and April 2017, 186 products (including dairy snacks, cheese snacks, breakfast cereals, snack bars, ice-creams and icy poles) that displayed characters, popular personalities or licensed imagery on the packaging were captured in a cross-sectional survey via Coles, Woolworths and Aldi stores and online shopping websites in Melbourne, Australia. These products were assessed for 'healthiness' using the [FSANZ Nutrient Profiling Scoring Criterion](#).

### About the Obesity Policy Coalition

The Obesity Policy Coalition (OPC) is a partnership between Cancer Council Victoria, Diabetes Victoria and the Global Obesity Centre at Deakin University, a World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention. The OPC advocates for evidence-based policy and regulatory change to address overweight, obesity and unhealthy diets in Australia.

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<sup>i</sup> Cairns, G., K. Angus, and G. Hastings, *The extent, nature and effects of food promotion to children: A review of the evidence to December 2008, 2009*, WHO: Geneva

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