

The StanMark Project

International agencies recognise the need for a code of marketing standards for promoting food and beverages to children, especially where this marketing crosses national borders – e.g. through media such as the Internet, satellite TV channels, and product placement in broadcast sports events and in internationally distributed games, videos and movies.

The StanMark project aims to bring together researchers and policy-makers to establish a set of standards for marketing foods and beverages consistent with the recommendations of the World Health Organization.

Objectives

- Convene** a series of meetings to bring together key members of the scientific research community and policy-making community to consider specific aspects of marketing to children which may relate to their health.
- Identify** current schemes and strategies to control promotional marketing to children, including measures not specifically addressing foods and beverages, or not specifically directed to child protection.
- Explore** the use of standards and marketing codes to influence commercial activity, including standards from other industrial sectors.
- Propose** a set of standards to form the basis for a cross-border code of marketing to be applied by companies and monitored by independent agencies.
- Develop** web-based resources for policy development on food marketing to children, to support advocacy organisations around the globe.

Project partners

- International Association for the Study of Obesity / International Obesity TaskForce
London, UK
- Rudd Centre for Food Policy and Obesity, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, USA
- Public Health Nutrition, Metropolitan University College, Copenhagen, Denmark

www.stanmarkproject.net



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Proposed cross-border standards for marketing food and beverages to children	StanMark Standards for Marketing to children	
An EU-funded project led by IASO		

In May 2010 the 63rd World Health Assembly of 193 governments endorsed a set of recommendations on marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children and called for international action to reduce the impact on children of the marketing of foods or beverages high in saturated or *trans* fats, free sugars or salt (HSTFSS).¹ The recommendations formed part of the World Health Organization’s global strategy for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases. The Assembly urged member nations to take action to reduce both the exposure of children to, and the power of, the marketing of such foods.

However, national governments may not be able to control all the marketing practices that influence a child’s diet. Marketing opportunities arise when TV channels are received from sources outside national boundaries, when Internet access is largely unmediated, when sponsored sporting events are transmitted globally, and when films and videogames are traded across national borders. It follows that a set of universal standards can help to ensure that the marketing of HSTFSS products can fully comply with the World Health Assembly’s recommendations.

The marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages with a high content of fat, sugar or salt reaches children throughout the world. Efforts must be made to ensure that children everywhere are protected against the impact of such marketing and given the opportunity to grow and develop in an enabling food environment — one that fosters and encourages healthy dietary choices and promotes the maintenance of healthy weight.

Dr Ala Alwan, Assistant Director General, World Health Organization

Universal marketing standards have further benefits. Restricted marketing can serve to equalise the competitive environment for companies of different sizes. From an enforcement viewpoint, a set of universal standards can support national authorities, the private sector and civil society to ensure compliance and to respond to infringements. Further, where national authorities do not have the capacity to ensure children and adolescents are protected from local or cross-border marketing of foods and beverages, a set of internationally-agreed standards can ensure a common, minimum level of protection for young people in all nations.

The objective of universal standards is to institute rules which achieve maximum protection while remaining practical and economical in application. Although it could be proposed that children should not be exposed to *any* marketing, the present document takes a ‘risk-based’ approach to reducing exposure to the marketing of products linked to noncommunicable diseases, i.e. HSTFSS foods and beverages. The table overleaf identifies high standards for cross-border marketing which have been proposed as a result of consensus-building by reputable agencies, thus indicating that such standards are feasible, practical and economical.

¹ WHO, 2010. 63rd World Health Assembly. http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA63/A63_R14-en.pdf.

Issue	Objective for disease risk reduction	Standards — examples
Food and beverages		
The promotion of foods high in saturated and <i>trans</i> fat, sugar or salt (HSTFSS) can undermine children’s dietary health.	Risk reduction means promoting only those food and beverage products which conform to national dietary guidelines and international standards supporting WHO’s global strategy to prevent obesity and noncommunicable disease.	Categorisation of foods and beverages according to a validated nutrient profiling system: the UK statutory (Ofcom) model. ² Categorising foods according to a mix of food types and nutrient profiles: US Federal Interagency Working Group proposals. ³
Age groups		
Some marketing works below conscious control. Even when children and adolescents are aware of marketing, they may be trusting and uncritical of the messages. Media literacy does not reduce marketing message impact.	Risk reduction means promoting only to those persons who have reached an age when they are legally considered to be competent to protect their own welfare. Permitted target age groups should be significantly older than this in order to avoid appealing to younger ages.	For alcohol, permitted target age groups may be significantly above the minimum legal age for drinking – an example is the ban on targeting people under age 25 (Facebook sites in India and Sweden). ⁴ For food and beverages, the UK Ofcom ban applies during TV programmes which <i>appeal to children under age 16</i> . ²
Media		
Cross-border media services are not easily controlled by the jurisdiction in the territory where the message is received.	Risk reduction means including all media which carry marketing messages across national borders (e.g: Internet, satellite and cable TV, films and games). A comprehensive approach assumes <i>all media unless specifically exempted</i> . Media crossing several time zones should be assumed to reach children and adolescents.	Facebook prohibits tobacco and gambling marketing and restricts alcohol marketing. ⁵ For tobacco, the Framework Convention (FCTC) is comprehensive: “ <i>all forms of commercial communication, recommendation or action and any form of contribution to an event, activity or individual</i> ”. ⁶
Marketing methods		
Children and adolescents are exposed to a wide range of promotional marketing methods including those designed to target them and those designed to target non-child audiences.	Risk reduction means excluding techniques with special appeal to children and adolescents and reducing young people’s exposure to all HSTFSS food and beverage promotion. Food packaging, formulation and presentation are included, as are sponsored sports events and product placements.	For tobacco, the FCTC covers actions which have the “ <i>aim, effect, or likely effect</i> of promoting a tobacco product or tobacco use either <i>directly or indirectly</i> ”. It specifies all “ <i>advertising, promotion and sponsorship</i> ”. ⁶ For breast-milk substitutes, the International Code specifies “ <i>product promotion, distribution, selling, advertising, product public relations, and information services</i> ”. ⁷
Settings		
Authorities responsible for standards where children are gathered, such as schools and childcare facilities, have a duty to ensure that nothing prejudices a child’s wellbeing.	Risk reduction means that all settings where children gather should be free from the promotion of HSTFSS food and beverages, including brands, logos, vouchers and gifts associated with such products.	A comprehensive approach avoids the need to specify every possible setting. The WHO Recommendations suggest “ <i>settings [which] include, but are not limited to, nurseries, schools, school grounds and pre-school centres, playgrounds, family and child clinics and paediatric services and during any sporting and cultural activities that are held on these premises</i> ”. ⁸
Accountability		
Marketing messages are produced and distributed by diverse stakeholders including food producers, manufacturers, importers or sellers, advertising agencies, media companies, media distributors and retailers, web content hosts, web access providers and web search engines.	Risk reduction requires a duty of care and attention to the protection of children and adolescents be exercised by all parties in the dissemination of marketing messages. For sponsorship media this includes sports event hosts. For promotional techniques embodied in a food product this includes importers, retailers and caterers.	Standards need to be enforceable through international agreements with sanctions. Possible standard-setting mechanisms include WHO health regulations, ISO standards and Codex Alimentarius standards.

² http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/consultations/foodads_new/statement/

³ Draft proposals at http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/workshops/sizingup/SNAC_PAC.pdf

⁴ <http://www.insidefacebook.com/2010/10/08/alcohol-advertisement-guidelines/>

⁵ http://www.facebook.com/ad_guidelines.php

⁶ http://www.who.int/fctc/guidelines/article_13.pdf

⁷ http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/code_english.pdf

⁸ <http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/marketing-food-to-children/en/index.html>