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
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Proposed cross-border standards for marketing food and beverages 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). 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.

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Issue</strong></th>
<th><strong>Objective for disease risk reduction</strong></th>
<th><strong>Standards — examples</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Food and beverages</strong></td>
<td>The promotion of foods high in saturated and <em>trans</em> fat, sugar or salt (HSTFSS) can undermine children’s dietary health.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td><strong>Age groups</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td><strong>Media</strong></td>
<td>Cross-border media services are not easily controlled by the jurisdiction in the territory where the message is received.</td>
<td>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 all media unless specifically exempted. Media crossing several time zones should be assumed to reach children and adolescents.</td>
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<td><strong>Marketing methods</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td><strong>Settings</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td><strong>Accountability</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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.</td>
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7 [http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/code_english.pdf](http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/code_english.pdf)