
Friday, 8 February 2008

SA CALL TO BAN JUNK FOOD ADS FOR KIDS

The State Government has called for junk food and drink advertisers to agree to an Australia-wide voluntary withdrawal of their advertisements in children's television viewing times – or South Australia will take its own action.

Health Minister John Hill has issued the ultimatum, calling for both junk food advertisers and TV stations to stop the targeting of children with the advertisements during their peak TV viewing times.

“I want junk food and drink advertising in children's television to be dropped – and if they fail to do this the State Government is prepared to go it alone and introduce our own ban on these ads if all else fails.

“With SA figures showing one in five of our state's four-year-olds is either overweight or obese, and similar figures across Australia, these big companies need to take action and be part of the campaign to stop the escalating obesity crisis.”

Health Minister John Hill said the Government would start canvassing how the state might introduce its own ban, and then consult with industry and other interested parties.

“We would prefer a ban to be imposed nationally, and we would prefer the industries involved to take their own action, but the State Government has sought legal advice on a state ban and the advice we have is that we can push ahead with legislation to introduce a SA ban as a last resort,” he said.

The move follows other action by the State Government on the childhood obesity crisis, including a ban on junk food sold in public schools and the introduction of healthy eating guidelines for pre-schools.

“We want to see these ads taken off our TV screens during kids' viewing times,” Minister Hill said.

“We know that when tobacco advertising was banned the impact was that tobacco use declined dramatically.

“And we also know that parents are very worried about the impact of these ads and the influence they have on children. Parents are particularly worried that these ads influence the way children spend their pocket money when they are unsupervised by adults.

“Parents are also affected by what we call “pester power” – the ability of children to influence what goes in the supermarket trolley through intensive pestering of their parents.”

Minister Hill said a survey last year by the Department of Health last year provided evidence of the level of concern of SA parents.

The survey showed:

- 78% of people surveyed agreed that there was too much advertising of unhealthy food during children's TV viewing times – up from 71% when the survey was conducted in 2004.
- Up to 84% of people surveyed agreed that television advertisements for food such as chocolates and lollies and junk food prompted children to persuade their parents to purchase the food advertised.
- 90% of people surveyed believed that advertising on television of toys and giveaways associated with food products influenced children to want to buy the food.

NSW research from last year reveals that there were 10 advertisements for high fat and /or sugary foods shown per hour during peak children's viewing times on Sydney commercial TV.

Commissioned by NSW Health and conducted by the NSW Centre for Overweight and Obesity, the *Food Advertising on Sydney Commercial Television: Extent and Nature of Children's Exposure 2006-2007* research analysed children's exposure to television food advertising on Sydney Commercial Television in May 2007.

It showed:

- The proportion of high fat and high sugar food advertising during the most popular programs for children 5 to 12 years increased from 66 per cent to 72 per cent from 2006 to 2007
- In 2007 there were 10.6 advertisements for high fat and high sugar foods per hour during programs most viewed by 5 to 12 year olds compared to nine per hour in 2006

The South Australian Parliament's Social Development Committee recently investigated the issue of childhood obesity, and called for controls over TV advertising for children.

In the UK, the communications regulator, OFCOM, has introduced advertising rules for foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar. The regulator has banned these ads during all programs that are made for children including pre-schoolers, or any program that has particular appeal to people under the age of 16, from 2009.

The State Government will look at this model, pushing for a voluntary withdrawal of ads that promote products - food and drink - that are high in fat, salt and sugar in children's TV programming.