



Childhood Obesity and the Marketing of Junk Food in Schools

"Excessive bodyweight probably now constitutes the most common paediatric medical problem in the USA."—Lancet

Childhood obesity is epidemic in the United States.

- 15.3% of children 6-11 are overweight¹, an increase of 382% since 1974.²
- 15.5% of children 12-19 are overweight,^{3,4} an increase of 258% since 1974.⁵

Childhood obesity is a serious disease.

- Complications of childhood obesity include type 2 diabetes, hypertension, dyslipidemia, chronic inflammation and hyperinsulinemia, among many other illnesses.
- Childhood obesity is a difficult disease to cure; once children become obese they are predisposed to obesity for the rest of their lives.
- Potential complications—especially cardiovascular disease—grow more serious with age.

The human toll of the obesity epidemic in the United States is staggering.

- Between 280,000 and 325,000 people die each year from obesity.⁷ In comparison, about 418,000 die from smoking-related illnesses.⁸

Soda consumption is rising sharply among children.

- From 1977 to 1996, soda consumption by 12-19 year olds increased 75% for boys and 40% for girls.⁹
- The average 12-ounce soda contains about 150 calories, including about 40 grams (10 teaspoons) of added sugars.
- Many soda brands contain caffeine, a mildly addictive stimulant.

Kids who drink more soda are more likely to become obese.

- The likelihood of "becoming obese among children increased 1.6 times for each additional can or glass of sugar-sweetened drink that they consumed every day." —Lancet¹⁰

Sale of soft drinks and candy is rife in the schools.

- The majority of K-12 schools (93.6%, 83.5% and 58.1% of senior, middle/junior and elementary schools) allow the sale of soft drinks and other high-added-sugar drinks in vending machines, school store, cafeteria or canteen.
- 72.2%, 46.6% and 29.2% of senior, middle/junior and elementary schools allow the sale of chocolate candy.¹¹

Fast food outlets are growing more common in schools.

- 20.2% of schools sell high-fat fast food such as Pizza Hut and McDonald's.¹²

Junk food companies have harnessed the schools to promote junk food.

- Channel One, an in-school TV marketing program, plays two minutes of ads each school day to 5.7 million children in 12,000 schools, including ads for Hostess Twinkies, Pepsi, Mountain Dew, M&M's and Snickers bars.
- Of school districts that allow companies such as Coca-Cola and PepsiCo to sell soft drinks at school, 35.3% allow the companies to place their ads in school buildings and 43% allow the ads on school grounds.¹³

Few schoolchildren are protected from junk food marketers.

- No states prohibit sales of junk food in a la carte service.¹⁴
- Only West Virginia bans the sale of junk food in vending machines.¹⁵
- Only Colorado, Connecticut and West Virginia ban the sale of junk food in school stores.¹⁶

We're winning! Recent victories in removing junk food marketing from schools:

- California: banned sale of junk food and soda in elementary schools and sale of soda in middle schools as of 1/1/04 (10/01).
- Texas: banned sale of soda, candy, foods of minimal nutritional value from hallways, lunchrooms, common areas during mealtimes (4/02).
- Los Angeles: banned sale of soda in all LA public schools as of 1/1/04 (8/02).
- Oakland: banned sale of soda, candy from Oakland public schools (12/01).
- Nashville: banned Channel One from Nashville public schools (9/02).
- San Francisco: banned sale of soda, candy in cafeterias as of 2003-4 school year (1/03).
- Seattle: banned Channel One from Seattle public schools as of 2004-5 school year (11/01).

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For more information about eliminating the marketing and sale of junk food in schools, or to become a citizen member, please contact Commercial Alert at (503) 235-8012 or email info@commercialalert.org.

SOURCES

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