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Children's Exposure to TV Ads for Candy Increased Substantially After Companies Promised Not to Advertise to Kids

Hartford, Conn. – Despite voluntary pledges from candy makers not to advertise to children 11 and under, children viewed substantially more TV ads for candy than they did four years earlier, when the promises went into effect, according to a new study by the Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at the University of Connecticut.

From 2008 to 2011, children's exposure to candy ads on U.S. TV increased 74 percent, rising to an average of 485 ads viewed per child in 2011 compared to an average of 279 ads viewed per child in 2008, according to the study.

Most of the ads accounting for the increase were from companies that participate in the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI), a self-regulatory program to improve food marketing to children that began in 2007.

"Although companies that belong to the CFBAI publicly state that candy should not be advertised directly to children, these findings clearly demonstrate that they have found many ways to advertise candy to children without technically violating their pledges not to do so," said Jennifer Harris, PhD, the study's lead author and the Rudd Center's Director of Marketing Initiatives.

The new study, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Rudd Foundation, was published online today in the journal *Appetite*.

This study examines the increase in TV advertising for candy viewed by children, and details how companies use techniques that appeal to children, and placement in shows that many children watch, to advertise candy on TV. In the new study, researchers examined TV ads for 36 candy brands advertised by 16 companies in 2011.

Using syndicated marketing data, researchers quantified candy advertising viewed by children on children's and other types of television programming. Researchers also viewed the ads to identify common techniques used in child-targeted advertising, such as animated characters and fun messages.

The key findings include:

- Of 485 candy ads viewed on TV by children in 2011, 365 were from companies participating in the CFBAI, and 315 of these ads were for brands which companies promised not to advertise directly to children (ages 2-11).
- From 2008 to 2011, advertising for candy brands from Hershey, Mars, Nestle, and Kraft, which all pledged not to advertise candy to children, increased 152 percent (rising from 125 to 315 ads viewed). Of note, Hershey accounted for 170 of the 190 additional ads viewed.
- One third of the ads viewed by children for candy brands covered by the CFBAI pledges appeared on networks with a higher-than-average share of youth under 18 in the audience, including Nick at Nite, ABC Family and Adult Swim. Importantly, these programs do not qualify as child-directed according to the CFBAI.
- Advertising by candy brands not participating in the CFBAI increased at a lower rate - 41 percent (increasing from 85 to 120 ads viewed).

“While the companies are following the letter of the law in their pledges, this study highlights substantial loopholes,” said Marlene Schwartz, PhD, study co-author and Director of the Rudd Center. “We would like to see CFBAI adopt a more comprehensive definition of ‘child-directed advertising’ so that these pledges lead to meaningful changes in children’s true exposure to unhealthy food marketing.”

Recommendations for responsible food marketing practices directed at children, issued earlier this year by an expert panel convened by Healthy Eating Research, include expanding the definition of child-directed media to programs where children up to age 14 make up 25 percent or more of the audience. CFBAI defines children as up to 11 years old, and uses a threshold of 35 percent of audience share.

Other authors of the study include Megan LoDolce and Cathryn Dembek of the Rudd Center.

About the UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity

The Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at the University of Connecticut is a distinguished multi-disciplinary policy research center dedicated to improving the world’s diet, preventing obesity and reducing weight stigma. The Rudd Center is a leader in building broad-based consensus to change diet and activity patterns by conducting research and educating policy makers and the public. For more information, visit www.uconnruddcenter.org or follow us on [Twitter](#) at or on [Facebook](#).

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