

Key facts

In 2016, more than **84 million children aged 5–19 years** were overweight or obese—a **43% increase** since 2010.

Around **7.2 million children under 5 years** in the Region are overweight or obese.

Children are heavily influenced by the marketing of foods high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars or salt.

There is a recognized link between **unhealthy food marketing and childhood obesity**.

Two out of 3 babies are not exclusively breastfed for 6 months, threatening their health and development.

Rapid economic growth, urbanization and globalization have changed the food system, making cheap, processed foods of low nutritional value more accessible.

Now, more than ever, children are exposed to potential harms from the marketing of breast-milk substitute and foods high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars or salt. While considerable progress has been made in reducing undernutrition, rates of childhood overweight, obesity and diet-related noncommunicable diseases, such as diabetes, are rising.

Good nutrition during childhood is essential for optimal growth and development, and it forms the foundations of good health in later life. WHO recommends **all babies be breastfed within the first hour of life**, and **exclusive breastfeeding should continue for 6 months**, followed by the introduction of appropriate complementary foods while breastfeeding continues until age 2 years or beyond. However, breast-milk substitutes continue to be widely promoted across the Region.

The majority of food marketing to children in the Region is for products high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars or salt. Children are extremely susceptible to such marketing. It influences their food knowledge, dietary preferences and behaviours, purchase requests and body weight.

WHO response

To protect children from the harmful impacts of food marketing, WHO has developed several evidence-based recommendations, including the *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes*, and the *Set of Recommendations on the Marketing of Foods and Non-alcoholic Beverages to Children and Ending Inappropriate Promotion of Foods for Infants and Young Children*.

However, **translating recommendations into policies remains a challenge**. Only **11 out of 37 countries and areas** in the Region have some form of legal measure in place covering all or some provisions of the Code.

Concerned with this slow progress, in 2017, Member States in the Western Pacific Region endorsed a resolution calling for the development of a **regional plan to accelerate action**. The draft *Regional Action Framework on Protecting Children from the Harmful Impact of Food Marketing in the Western Pacific (2020–2030)* was developed in consultation with experts, Member States and stakeholders.

WHO continues to support countries in the Region through policy strengthening, multisectoral collaboration, advocacy and communications, and monitoring and evaluation.



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