

Irish Heart Foundation urges parents to join campaign against food marketing to children

Food marketing to children still strong source of concern

The Irish Heart Foundation has called on parents to become watchdogs to protect their children against the marketing of unhealthy foods through TV adverts, social networking sites and cartoons. Together with the National Heart Alliance (NHA), the Foundation is urging parents to join the Children's Food Campaign online at www.childrensfoodcampaign.net

According to the Alliance and the Irish Heart Foundation, children in Ireland are targeted *daily* with energy-dense foods in schools, through TV advertising, websites, free toy promotions and through cartoon characters or celebrities. The new website aims to highlight these issues to parents to increase their understanding and support for the Children's Food Campaign and generate debate.

One in five Irish children aged between five and 12 years old is overweight or obese¹ and the same figure is true for 13 to 17 year olds². The National Heart Alliance and Irish Heart Foundation continue to call for a ban on TV advertising of unhealthy foods up to 9pm which is supported by four out of five parents³. Nine out of 10 parents also agreed that advertising influences their children's food choices³.

Janis Morrissey from the Irish Heart Foundation said: "The Children's Food Campaign website was set up in response to parental concern about lack of legislation and control over food ads to children. But also to raise awareness among those parents who may not be aware of the marketing subtleties employed such as fun cartoon characters on packaging, to attract children towards unhealthy foods. As the national heart health charity our constant aim is to make the healthy choice the easy choice and that is why it is important to make food marketing issues as transparent as possible for parents and the general public."

¹ Irish Universities Nutrition Alliance (2005) National Children's Food Survey www.iuna.net

² Irish Universities Nutrition Alliance (2008) National Teens' Food Survey www.iuna.net

³ National Heart Alliance and Red C (2008) Food Advertising - National Opinion Poll of Irish Parents. www.irishheart.ie

One parent visiting the new website said: “I am amazed how many food products aimed solely at children are so full of sugar or additives. I would also like to see better labelling with products aimed at children showing the recommended daily allowances for children and not for adults.”

Margot Brennan of the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute and NHA member said: “A fifth of Irish children’s energy comes from sweets, snacks and biscuits and an average of two glasses of mainly sugar-containing soft drinks are consumed each day. As dietitians, we believe that a ban on food marketing to children would be a significant step in supporting parents to reduce their child’s intake of unhealthy foods and in turn help to tackle obesity.”

The Children's Food Campaign led by the National Heart Alliance and the Irish Heart Foundation has created a paper on all forms of unhealthy food marketing to children⁴. The main recommendations include:

- A healthy eating policy in schools.
- More support for parents and guardians on encouraging healthy eating in the home.
- A healthy eating policy for children's healthcare facilities.
- The retail sector and manufacturers have a vital role to play.
- The type and amount of food marketing to children needs to be monitored.

Recent figures showed that in Irish secondary schools, the sale of unhealthy foods is the most prevalent form of marketing: 74% sell confectionary; 57% sell salty snacks and crisps and 52% sell fizzy drinks⁵.

Join the Children’s Food Campaign today and have your say on www.childrensfoodcampaign.net

-ends-

Media queries to Caroline Cullen, Communications Manager, Irish Heart Foundation

Tel: 01 6685001 Mob: 086-6049282

⁴ National Heart Alliance and Irish Heart Foundation (2008) Children’s Food Campaign: Protecting Children from Marketing of Unhealthy Foods – Position Paper. www.irishheart.ie

⁵ Kelly, C. & Nic Gabhainn, S. (2007) *Marketing of Foodstuffs in Post-Primary Schools in Ireland*, www.irishheart.ie