Systematic reviews of the evidence on the nature, extent and effects of food marketing to children. A retrospective summary

Over the years, policies have highlighted that the promotion of low nutrition foods is a modifiable risk factor for non-communicable disease and is linked to the international obesity crisis. In light of that, this systematic review was conducted (i) to provide a summary of the public health evidence base that has informed policy development to date and (ii) to highlight evidence gaps pertinent to next steps in developing effective marketing control policies.

To fulfil these purposes, specific research questions were developed around two areas of inquiry: the nature and extent of food promotion to children; and the effects of food promotion to children. A total of 99 primary studies and 16 review articles met inclusion criteria.

Overall, television was identified as the most popular promotion channel and foods high in fat, sugar and salt were identified as the most common categories of food products promoted to children. Furthermore, children were identified as a targeted consumer group: food promotion strategies were most often directed towards them, with increased use of entertainment techniques. While the current evidence base provides limited insight on how policy effectiveness may be strengthened, this review identifies that the successful implementation of WHO’s Set of Marketing Recommendations would reduce children’s exposure to a significant modifiable risk factor for non-communicable diseases, overweight and obesity.