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Heavy marketing of energy-dense nutrient-poor foods around public basic schools in Greater Accra region, Ghana

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Introduction

The marketing of energy-dense nutrient-poor food products is common in obesogenic food environments⁷. The extent of marketing within surroundings where children live and play has the potential to influence their food choices². We examined the extent and nature of marketing of foods, alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages around selected schools in Ghana’s most urbanized region, the Greater Accra region.

Methods or approach

Basic schools (n =200) were selected using a multi-stage systematic sampling approach in six randomly selected districts of Greater Accra region – as part of the Measurement, Evaluation, Accountability, and Leadership Support for NCDs Prevention Study (MEALS4NCDs)³. This cross-sectional study assessed outdoor advertising around the selected schools using an adapted protocol from the International Network for Food and Obesity/Non-communicable Diseases Research, Monitoring and Action Support (INFORMAS)⁶. All outdoor advertisements (of food and non-food products) – within 250m road network distance from the entrance of all selected schools were mapped. For each food advertisement, a pre-designed tool, was used to enter information—including setting, type and size of advertisement, number of food products in the advertisement, and promotional techniques used. Digital photographs and GPS coordinates of all food advertisements were also collected. All advertised food products were classified and assigned to three major groups: core/healthy foods, non-core/unhealthy foods and miscellaneous based on the INFORMAS protocol.⁴,⁵

Results Findings and interpretations

A total of 5,887 advertisements were identified in the areas surveyed around the schools; 41.9% of these advertisements were for food. The majority (48.7%) of the food advertisements were small in size (> A4 paper but <1.3m x 1.9m). Advertisements were prevalent at food outlets (77.9%) and in other settings - along roads and on buildings. Promotional characters were included within 13.5% (334/2469) of all food advertisements; cartoons/manufacturer’s characters 69.2% (231/334) were the most dominant. About 8% of all food advertisements (184/2469) had premium offers including price discount and gift/collectables. Overall, 70.2% of food advertisements were classified as
unhealthy 11.5% as healthy, and 14.3% as miscellaneous. Sugar-sweetened beverages (34.5%) was the most frequently promoted food product category. There were on average (standard deviation) 12.70 (13.03) food advertisements classified as unhealthy per school.

Conclusions
There is an abundance of unhealthy food advertisements around public basic schools in Accra. Policies and actions are needed to protect pupils from such marketing practices.

References


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