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Ads Are Selling U.S. Kids Poor Health: Experts

By Amanda Gardner
HealthDay Reporter
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MONDAY, Dec. 4 (HealthDay News) -- Children and adolescents are being bombarded by so many ads that medical experts now fear for their health.

Some 40,000 ads a year from television alone may be boosting obesity, poor nutrition and cigarette and alcohol use among U.S. youth, according to a revised statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

The statement, which appears in the December issue of Pediatrics, calls for more media education to counter some of advertising's negative effects.

"We're pleading with pediatricians and parents to become aware that consumeristic tendencies are being fed right from birth," said Dr. Donald Shifrin, chairman of the AAP Committee on Communications, which issued the statement, and a pediatrician in private practice in Seattle. "We have to understand that youngsters under a certain age cannot differentiate between a commercial and a program. To them, it's real. There should be some effort on the part of parents to point out that this is a commercial."

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"It's so important that pediatricians and parents be aware of the pressure that kids are under, and for professional groups such as this one to keep putting pressure on industry," added David Jernigan, executive director of the Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth at Georgetown University, in Washington D.C.

Advertising aimed at children and adults is ubiquitous. In addition to television, messages appear on the Internet, magazines and even school buses, school gymnasiums, book covers and school bathroom stalls.

According to the statement, Children, Adolescents, and Advertising, several European countries forbid or restrict advertising to children. Just this past week, Britain banned junk food commercials from the airways, Shifrin said. In the United States, on the other hand, the average young person is inundated by ads. "Youngsters as young as 6 months are being branded by the industry in terms of looking at certain toys, clothing and programming," Shifrin said.

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Among the recommendations to pediatricians:

Advocate for confining ads for erectile dysfunction drugs to after 10 p.m. Only subscribe to magazines that are free of tobacco and alcohol ads for waiting rooms (

Good Housekeeping

has refused tobacco ads since 1952). Advise patients to limit noneducational screen time to no more than two hours each day. Write letters to advertisers if they see inappropriate ads. Work with community groups and local school boards to implement media education programs for young people. Work with parents, schools, community groups and others to ban or curtail school-based advertising. Work with parent and public groups to ask Congress to limit commercial advertising on children's programming; implement a ban on tobacco advertising in all media; restrict alcohol advertising so only the product is shown, not cartoon characters or attractive women; ban junk-food advertising during programming that is predominantly for children; increase funding for public TV; convene a national task force on advertising. Work with the entertainment industry to make advertising for birth control more widely disseminated on network TV, among other things.

Shifrin is hopeful that change will come. "Food marketing to children is already changing," he said. "We're for progress, but we're hoping to increase awareness that this has a significant effect on youngsters' health."

More information

There's more on advertising's impact on youngsters at the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#).

SOURCES: Donald Shifrin, M.D., chair, AAP Committee on Communications and pediatrician in private practice, Seattle; David Jernigan, Ph.D., research director, Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth, Georgetown University, Washington D.C.; December 2006 Pediatrics



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