

# Food Labeling For Children

Shannon Allen & Ellen Goddard  
University of Alberta

PPOCIR Workshop Dec. 5, 2014



# Policies for the Protection of Children as Consumers



- In Canada, we recognize children as a vulnerable population and as such have specific policies aimed at protecting them.
- The Canada Consumer Product Safety Act<sup>(1)</sup> has various regulations pertaining to children's products such as
  - Strollers
  - Sleepwear
  - Cribs, bassinets, and playpens
  - Toys
- When it comes to advertising, Advertising Standards Canada has a code specific to children<sup>(2)</sup>, but this is only a self-regulatory approach.
- Advertising directed to children has been prohibited in Quebec since 1980 by the Quebec Consumer Protection Act<sup>(2)</sup>



# Some warning labels you may see on children's products in Canada



On balloons:

**WARNING!**

**CHOKING HAZARD** - Children under 8 years can choke or suffocate on uninflated or broken balloons. Adult supervision required. Keep uninflated balloons away from children. Discard broken balloons at once.

On sleepwear:

**NOT FLAME RESISTANT**

# + Warning labels on adult products

- What if a product is not safe if used as intended?



**WARNING**

**When you smoke it shows.**

**Cigarettes are addictive and harmful.**

**You have the will. There is a way.**

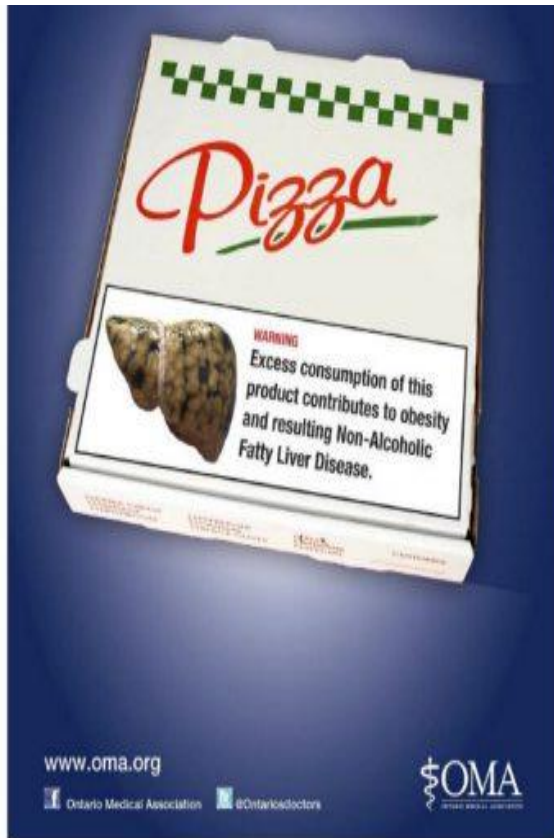
**1-866-366-3667**  
**[gosomefree.gc.ca/quit](http://gosomefree.gc.ca/quit)**

**Health Canada**

<http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/09/27/more-shocking-cigarette-pack-warnings-on-the-way-in-canada/>

# + Should this apply to food?

- We know that overconsumption of fat, salt, and sugar result in obesity, heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, etc... We could put cigarette-style warning labels on unhealthy foods.



<http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/10/23/ontario-docs-launch-assault-on-obesity-urging-tobacco-like-warnings-on-bad-food/>



KEACHER.COM

[http://www.keacher.com/files/IMG\\_1078.jpg](http://www.keacher.com/files/IMG_1078.jpg)

# + Why don't we have tobacco-style warning labels on unhealthy foods?



- Existing systems of self-regulation have not reduced the global proliferation of food marketing to children<sup>(3)</sup>
- There are some key differences between fast food and tobacco
  - Tobacco is well known to be lethal, whereas the relationship between food and health is more complex<sup>(3)</sup>
  - The tobacco industry has been uncooperative in the past, while the food industry has shown willingness to be part of the solution<sup>(3)</sup>
  - Food is a necessity! Tobacco is not.
- The main tools used in decreasing tobacco consumption are taxes, graphic warning labels, and bans on advertising.
  - Taxes on unhealthy food would disproportionately affect low-income families<sup>(4)</sup>
  - A study examining fast food consumption in Quebec found significantly lower fast food consumption<sup>(5)</sup>



# What about food intended for kids?

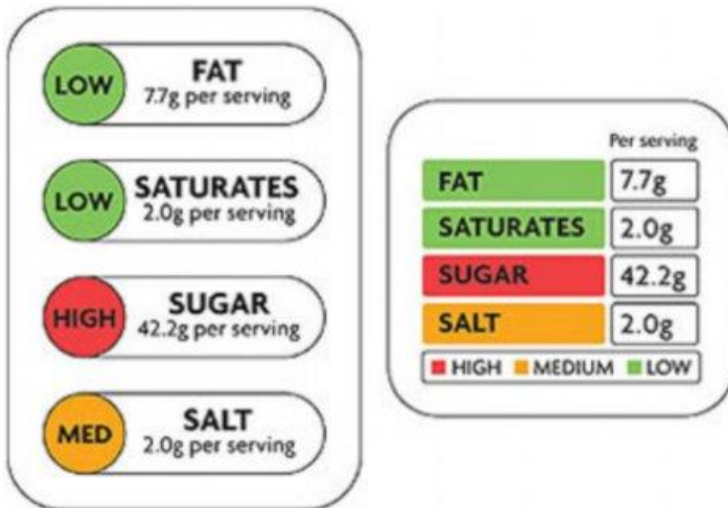


Poor eating behaviour and obesity in children cause health problems that last into the later stages of life and increases the risk of premature death<sup>(6)</sup>

- Most adults know that fast food is not a healthy choice, but do the kids eating it know that?
- How can we distinguish foods intended for children?
- Would kids react to a labeling mechanism?
- What type of label would be most effective in persuading kids to make healthier food choices?
  - Graphic
  - Educational
  - Traffic light

# + Examples of Label Types

Traffic light:



<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1178048/Red-warning-labels-junk-food-traffic-light-packaging-plan.html>

Educational:

YOU WOULD NEED TO CLIMB SIX FLIGHTS OF STAIRS TO BURN THE CALORIES CONTAINED IN THIS PRODUCT.

Graphic:



<http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/10/23/ontario-docs-launch-assault-on-obesity-urging-tobacco-like-warnings-on-bad-food/>





# Study on Children's Response to Warning Label and Price Interventions on Snack Foods<sup>(7)</sup>



## Objectives:

- To determine the effectiveness of using fat taxes and/or warning labels as a tool to persuade children to choose healthier snack foods.
- To determine whether these tools are equally effective among children with different levels of cognitive development.
  - Vocabulary
  - IQ
  - Executive Functioning

# + Background

- School-aged children have autonomous spending power and often use it to purchase energy dense / nutrition poor snack foods.
- In order to reduce the incidence of obesity, several tools have been proposed to aid people in making healthier food choices:

- Fat taxes

- (an increased price for less healthy foods)

- Warning labels

- (indicate risks of consuming less healthy foods)



- There is mixed evidence in the fat tax literature as to its effectiveness.<sup>(1,2,3,4,5)</sup> The literature on warning labels is less robust but does indicate potential.<sup>(6,7)</sup>
- No study to date focusing on how these interventions would affect children's food choices.

# + Methods & Findings



- Children aged 8-12 were interviewed at various out of school care facilities in Edmonton
  - questionnaire pertaining to snack food purchases
  - purchase experiment
  - measures of cognitive development
- In general, children would avoid foods with fat taxes or warning labels.
  - Fat taxes are more effective than warning labels
  - Children with higher EF are more price sensitive
  - Reaction to a warning label does not appear to differ based on age, gender, or cognitive measures



# Developing Policy to Protect Children from Poor Diets...



- Why do we have policies specific to children's products but not for children's foods?
  - Kids are not as aware of what foods are healthy
  - Kids are at greater risk of developing long term health problems as a result of a poor diet<sup>(6)</sup>
  - Society has a responsibility to protect children; this includes their health which is directly affected by diet
- Do we need more than a Nutrition Facts Panel on children's foods?
- What criteria should we use in determining what foods to place additional labels on?
- If we can determine a labeling method that is effective, it could prove to be an important policy tool in combating childhood obesity.

# + References



1. Canada Consumer Protection Product Safety Act (S.C. 2010, c.21), available at: <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-1.68/index.html>
2. Advertising Standards Canada; Children's advertising under the code, available at: [http://www.cab-acr.ca/english/social/advertisingchildren/kids\\_reference\\_guide.pdf](http://www.cab-acr.ca/english/social/advertisingchildren/kids_reference_guide.pdf)
3. Yach, D., C. Hawkes, J.E. Epping-Jordan, and S. Galbraith. (2003) The World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control: Implications for Global Epidemics of Food-Related Deaths and Disease. *Journal of Public Health Polilcy* 24(3/4):274-290.
4. Cash, S.B., D.L. Sunding, and D. Zilberman. (2005) Fat taxes and thin subsidies: prices, diet, and health outcomes. *Acta Agriculturae Scand Section C* 2.3-4:167-174.
5. Dhar, T. and K. Bayliss. (2011) Fast-Food Consumption and the Ban on advertising Targeting Children: The Quebec Experience. *Journal of Marketing Research* 48(5):799-813.
6. Ebbeling, C.B., D.B. Pawlak and D.S. Ludwig. (2002) Childhood obesity: public-health crisis, common sense cure. *The Lancet* 360(9331):473-482.
7. Cash, S., V. Adamowicz, S. Allen and A. McAlister. Children's Responses to Warning Label and Price Interventions on Snack Foods. (In progress)
8. Brownell, K.D. and T.R. Frieden. 2009. Ounces of prevention – The public policy case for taxes on sugared beverages. *New England Journal of Medicine* 360:1805-1808.
9. Cash, S.B. and R.D. Lacañilao. 2007. Taxing food to improve health: Economic evidence and arguments. *Agricultural and Resource Economics Review* 36(2):174-182.
10. Chaloupka, F.J., L.M. Powell, and J.F. Chriqui. 2009. Sugar-sweetened beverage taxes and public health. *HER/BTG Research Brief*, July 2009.
11. Jacobson, M.F. and K.D. Brownell. 2000. Small taxes on soft drinks and snack foods to promote health. *American Journal of Public Health* 90(6):854-857.
12. Schroeter, C., J. Lusk, and W. Tyner. 2008. Determining the impact of food price and income changes on body weight. *Journal of Health Economics* 27(1):45-68.
13. Kelly, B., C. Hughes, K. Chapman, J.C. Louie, H. Dixon, J. Crawford, L. King, M. Daube, and T. Slevin. 2009. Consumer testing of the acceptability and effectiveness of front-of-pack food labeling systems for the Australian grocery market. *Health Promotion International* 24(2):120-129.
14. Sacks, G., J.L. Veerman, M. Moodie, and B. Swinburn. 2011. 'Traffic-light' nutrition labeling and 'junk-food' tax: a modeled comparison of cost-effectiveness for obesity prevention. *International Journal of Obesity* 35:1001-1009.