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New WHO guidelines should be a call to industry to stop sugar-coating kids' foods

Australia needs to take action in response to new World Health Organization guidelines around sugar consumption, according to a coalition of leading health organisations, the Obesity Policy Coalition.

Overnight the World Health Organization put out revised recommendations for consultation stating that free sugar* should contribute only five percent of an individual's daily energy intake. This is almost half their previously recommended daily amount, representing around six teaspoons of a sugar a day, down from ten.

Executive Manager of the Obesity Policy Coalition, Jane Martin, said the recommendation should be heeded in Australia and that better labelling on packaged foods would empower consumers to take control of their diets.

"We know Australians are consuming far too much sugar but at the same time many people are trying to consciously eat healthier food. This is why labelling is so crucial.

"It's time for manufacturers to stop sugar-coating the truth about what's in our food with marketing spin and give Australians real information through clear front of pack labelling about what they're eating.

"At present it's not easy for parents to find this information at a glance while they're in the supermarket aisles. The use of a variety of terms for sugar on nutrition information panels such as 'fructose', 'glucose', 'corn syrup' and 'dextrose' can add further confusion.

"The information available on packs often doesn't distinguish added sugar from total sugar, which takes into account sugar naturally contained in products.

"Nevertheless, what is clear is that many of the foods marketed to children are particularly high in added sugar. For example, a serve of Kellogg's Nutri-Grain contains around two teaspoons of added sugar. Some products such as juice contain much more, which means some children could exceed the proposed guidelines before they've even finished breakfast.

"Young children require less kilojoules and therefore less sugar than adults for a healthy diet so the promotion of these high sugar products to families is unethical," said Ms Martin.

Ms Martin said there was good evidence that excess sugar consumption that wasn't burnt off by exercise resulted in individuals becoming overweight or

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obese. It is well established that obesity is a leading risk factor for type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers.

Professor Boyd Swinburn, Co-Director of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention at Deakin University, Melbourne noted the guidelines would likely also improve children’s dental health and minimise the risk of dental cavities throughout their lives, but he warned that governments will need to remain strong in the face of industry pressure.

“I expect that the sugar industry will start immediately attacking the credibility of WHO about this recommendation, like they did in 2003 when WHO set the 10% recommendation. They will be pulling all the political strings they can to prevent governments taking up this recommendation, and I sincerely hope that the Australian government is listening more to the solid evidence and recommendations from WHO than it is to the lobbying of the sugar industry,” he said

Amounts of total sugar in kids’ food products (per serve)ⁱ

<i>Product</i>	<i>Teaspoonsⁱⁱ</i>	<i>Grams</i>
Just Juice 100% Apple Juice Tetra Pack 200mL	5	20.2
Paddle Pop Rainbow (68g)	3.5	13.5
Kellogg’s Coco Pops (30g)	3	11
Calci-Yum Squeezie Kids Yoghurt Vanilla – 70g	2.5	9
Kellogg’s Nutri-Grain (30g)	2.5	9.6
Heinz Dora the Explorer Pasta Shapes in Tomato Sauce 220g	2	7.7

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* Free sugar is defined by the WHO as sugars added to food by the manufacturer, cook or consumer, plus sugars naturally present in honey, syrups and fruit juices.

About the Obesity Policy Coalition

The Obesity Policy Coalition is a group of leading public health agencies who are concerned about the escalating levels of overweight and obesity, particularly in children.



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The Obesity Policy Coalition is a partnership between Diabetes Australia - Vic, Cancer Council Victoria and the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention at Deakin University, with funding from VicHealth.



ⁱ Nutrition information sourced from Coles Online <http://shop.coles.com.au>. From available sources it was not possible to quantify added sugar or 'free sugar', therefore values represented here are total sugar.

ⁱⁱBased on 4g per teaspoon.

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