



# Happy Meal site sparks call for ad crackdown

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HEALTH

OBESITY experts have urged the federal government to crack down on junk food marketing to children after a McDonald's website promoting Happy Meals was deemed acceptable under the industry's self-regulatory code.

Two years after Australia's major fast-food chains promised to stop advertising unhealthy foods to under-14s, health groups say the industry is

making a mockery of its own code.

The McDonald's Happy Meal website promotes free toys with kids' meals, spruiks birthday parties at its restaurants and features cartoon characters including Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck.

But the Advertising Standards Bureau ruled the website, which also urges children to email friends and invite them to play games on the site, does not constitute marketing to kids.

Jane Martin of the Obesity Policy Coalition – a lobby group comprising the Cancer Council, VicHealth, Diabetes Australia and Deakin University – said junk food companies were increasingly using websites and social media to target children.

"This is an absurd and shocking decision. The [bureau] is refusing to take a commonsense approach in applying the code. Clearly this is a way of marketing to children, and to imply that it's anything other than that is just ridiculous," Ms Martin said.

"The website's covered in the toys

which come with the meal – its URL is happymeal.com.au. Why have they spent a huge amount of money building this website if it's not to promote happy meals?" If self-regulation doesn't apply to these sorts of websites, then the bureau is not up to the task of oversight and the government should step in, she said.

The bureau found the McDonald's website did not promote the fast-food chain or Happy Meals or actively encourage children to buy the product, "because the website is focused on providing games and entertainment to the child, and in most cases would be visited by the child only after they had purchased a Happy Meal".

McDonald's spokeswoman Laura Keith said the Happy Meal website complied with the code as it was not an ad but "a product in itself".

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