



Calls to beef up laws on junk food TV ads



THE Australian junk food industry is being warned to stop bombarding children with “insidious” television advertising or face regulatory changes, Health Minister John Hill says.

This comes as research by the CSIRO shows voluntary limits on television junk food advertising directed at children has been ineffective.

“The most impressionable members of our community are targeted by a torrent of unhealthy food messages everyday,” Mr Hill said.

Two self-regulatory initiatives were recently introduced in Australia and committed signatories to not advertise at all during children’s programs, including all pre-school rated (P) and children’s (C) programs, some general (G) programs and during programs when more than 50 per cent of the audience were children.

However, the research stated children’s exposure to advertising occurred when the initiatives may not apply, because many watched programs not targeted directly at them, which were screened in the evening from 5.30pm to 10pm. It found the majority of food ads on television were for junk foods and the most frequently advertised foods were fast foods followed by sugar-sweetened drinks.

Mr Hill called for the industry to:

USE transparent criteria to decide which foods were unhealthy.

EXTEND voluntary initiatives to times of the day when large numbers of children watch television including evening timeslots.

PROHIBIT product placement in television shows.

“We can take regulatory action,” he warned.

Obesity Policy Coalition senior policy adviser Jane

Martin called on all governments to recognise the “pervasive influence” of the promotion of unhealthy food to children on television, the internet and direct marketing. “By implementing tough regulations on unhealthy food advertising, federal and state governments would be taking a giant leap towards decreasing children’s exposure to junk food marketing and reducing the burden of obesity,” she said.

Mr Hill said the state government and SA Health would work with the Australian National Preventive Health Agency and the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council to host a national seminar next year to discuss action and inaction on unhealthy food adverts.

Alistair, 10, said he had seen a lot of junk food ads when he watched television.

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BOMBARDED: Alistair, 10, in front of a McDonald's commercial. The CSIRO says voluntary limits on junk food advertising have been ineffective