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## **Preschoolers Still See TV Food Commercials Even Though Companies Promised Not to Direct Their Advertising to Children Under 6**

**Hartford, Conn.** – Preschool children ages 2 to 5 continue to view TV ads for foods and beverages daily, revealing a loophole in major food companies’ pledges that they will not direct any advertising to children under 6, according to a new study by the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at the University of Connecticut.

The study also showed that the advertisements appeal to children under 6 as much as they appeal to older children (ages 6-11) who companies say they are directing their ads towards. In addition, preschoolers were less likely to have tried the advertised products before seeing the ads, which research has shown makes them more susceptible to the influence of these ads.

“Our new research findings demonstrate that preschool-age children frequently view TV food ads and are likely highly influenced by ads that food and beverage companies have pledged to protect them from,” said Jennifer Harris, Director of Marketing Initiatives at the Rudd Center, and lead author of the study.

Child development experts have concluded that advertising to children under 6 is unfair as they do not have the cognitive ability to distinguish advertising from other types of information and thus cannot counteract its influence. As a result, they recommend that preschool-age children should be protected from advertising in any form.

In response to these concerns, major food companies participating in the Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI) industry self-regulation program, implemented in 2006, have pledged not to direct advertising for any of their products to children under 6. However, they still see ads from these companies because most young children also watch commercial children’s TV programs that are also popular with older children, such as Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network, where food companies frequently place their ads.

The new research findings, published in the journal *Appetite*, included two studies that assessed the amount and potential impact of food-related TV advertising exposure on preschool-aged children. The first study used Nielsen advertising data to compare preschoolers’ (2-5 years) and older children’s (6-11 years) exposure to TV food advertising in 2015. In the second study, 49 young children in a child-care setting viewed food ads that commonly appeared on children’s TV programming. Researchers measured their attitude about these child-directed ads and advertised products, and compared responses by 4- to 5- year olds and 6- to 7- year olds.

Key findings include:

**Study: Amount of TV Food Ads**

- On average, preschoolers viewed 1.6 ads-per-day on children’s TV programming in 2015 that were placed by CFBAI-participating companies, even though companies complied with their stated pledges to not direct advertising to young children, which they define specifically as programs where children under 6 make up 35 percent or more of the audience
- Thirty-two different food-related companies placed ads on children’s programming, and nine CFBAI-participating companies were responsible for 63 percent of the ads viewed by preschoolers and 69 percent of ads viewed by older children.

**Study: Potential Impact of Exposure to TV Food Ads**

- In the second study, the majority of the children in both age groups (4 to 5 and 6 to 7) responded positively to the child-directed ads, indicating that they were fun and cool, and the commercials made them feel happy. When asked who would like these ads most, 42 percent of children ages 6 to 11 thought someone younger than them would like them the most.
- For both age groups, positive attitudes about the ad predicted whether children thought they would like the advertised product. However, for younger, but not older children, liking the ad increased the probability that they thought they would like the product if they had not tried it before. This finding supports previous research that has shown that enjoyable advertising is more effective when it reaches children before they try the product for the first time.

“Food companies and media companies airing children’s programming should do more to protect young children from advertising that takes advantage of their vulnerabilities,” Harris said. “At a minimum food companies should not advertise during programming where children under age 6 are likely to see their ads, regardless of whether older children are also watching. Media companies that broadcast children’s TV programming could also take action, such as the Walt Disney Company’s initiative to establish nutrition standards for food advertising to children on its networks.”

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The study was co-authored by Svetlana Kalnova of the Rudd Center.

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**About the UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity**

The Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity at the University of Connecticut is a distinguished multi-disciplinary policy research center dedicated to promoting solutions to childhood obesity, poor diet, and weight bias through research and policy. The Rudd Center is a leader in building broad-based consensus to change diet by conducting research and educating policy makers and the public. For more information, visit

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