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***Cereal FACTS 2012: A Spoonful of Progress
in a Bowl Full of Unhealthy Marketing to Kids***

New Haven, Conn. – Cereal companies have improved the nutritional quality of most cereals marketed directly to children, but they also have increased advertising to children for many of their least nutritious products, according to a report by the Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity.

From 2008 to 2011, total media spending to promote child-targeted cereals increased by 34 percent. The Cereal FACTS report quantifies changes in the nutritional quality of cereals and children's exposure to cereal marketing after companies pledged to reduce marketing of unhealthy products to children. The detailed findings will be presented on Sunday, June 24, during the Biennial Conference of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues in Charlotte, North Carolina.

“Children still get one spoonful of sugar in every three spoonfuls of cereal. These products are not nutritious options that children should consume every day,” said lead researcher Jennifer L. Harris, director of marketing initiatives at the Rudd Center.

With the launch of the industry-led Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative in 2006, major companies such as General Mills, Kellogg, and Post promised to improve the nutritional value of their children's cereals and strengthen their standards for child-directed advertising. In 2009, the Rudd Center issued the first Cereal FACTS report, which found that the least healthy breakfast cereals were those most frequently and aggressively marketed directly to children as young as age 2.

Using the same methods as the original Cereal FACTS, the 2012 study examined the nutritional quality of more than 100 brands and nearly 300 individual varieties of cereal marketed to children, families and adults. Researchers also examined the scope of industry advertising on television, the Internet, and social media sites. The study was supported by grants from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Rudd Foundation.

The new Cereal FACTS report documents changes in industry practices since the first study period. Key findings include:

Changes for the better

Companies improved the nutritional quality of most cereals marketed to children:

- Overall nutritional quality improved for 13 of the 14 brands advertised to children. Of the 22 different varieties of these cereals available in both 2008 and 2011, 45% had less sodium, 32% had less sugar, and 23% had more fiber. General Mills improved the nutritional quality of all its child-targeted brands.

Companies reduced child-targeted advertising for some products:

- Millsberry.com and Postopia.com, the two most-visited children's advergaming sites, were discontinued. Due to the elimination of Millsberry.com, General Mills decreased banner advertising on children's websites by 43%.
- Children viewed fewer TV ads for 7 of 14 child-targeted brands, including Corn Pops and Honeycomb.

Changes for the worse

Companies increased child-targeted advertising for some of their least nutritious products:

- Children viewed more TV ads for the remaining seven child-targeted brands, including Reese's Puffs, Froot Loops, and Pebbles.
- Post launched a new Pebbles advergaming website, and General Mills launched new sites for Honey Nut Cheerios and Cinnamon Toast Crunch.
- Kellogg nearly doubled banner advertising on children's websites, such as Nickelodeon.com and Neopets.com, for its child-targeted brands. General Mills also increased banner advertising for four child-targeted brands, including Honey Nut Cheerios and Lucky Charms.
- Kellogg introduced the first food company advergaming for mobile phones and tablets targeted to children for Apple Jacks.

Companies increased advertising to Hispanic youth:

- Spending on Spanish-language TV advertising for all cereals more than doubled, and Hispanic children's exposure to these ads tripled.
- Cereal companies launched new Spanish-language TV campaigns for seven brands, including Froot Loops and Cinnamon Toast Crunch.

More of the same

Companies continue to aggressively market their least nutritious products directly to children:

- Companies do offer more nutritious and lower-sugar cereals for children, like regular Cheerios and Frosted Mini-Wheats, but they are marketed to parents, not children.

"While cereal companies have made small improvements to the nutrition of their child-targeted cereals, these cereals are still far worse than the products they market to adults. They have 56 percent more sugar, half as much fiber, and 50 percent more sodium," said co-author Marlene Schwartz, deputy director of the Rudd Center. "The companies know how to make a range of good-tasting cereals that aren't loaded with sugar and salt. Why can't they help parents out and market these directly to children instead?"

"It is obvious that industry regulating itself is a failure. If there is to be any hope of protecting children from predatory marketing, either public outcry or government action will be necessary to force the companies to change," added co-author Kelly Brownell, director of the Rudd Center.

Researchers measured youths' exposure to TV and Internet advertising from all cereal companies by using syndicated data from Nielsen and comScore, Inc., as well as independent analyses.

The full report and tools for consumers and researchers are available at www.cerealfacts.org. Follow the Rudd Center and the conversation on Twitter at @YaleRuddCenter with the hashtag #cerealfacts.

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