Limit junk-food ads that contribute to childhood obesity

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There are disproportionately higher rates of obesity and diet-related diseases among black and Latino youth compared to their white counterparts. Food companies disproportionally target their advertising for junk food towards black and Hispanic youth.

This exposure to food advertising increases their consumption of fast food and sugary beverages, which can contribute to high rates of obesity and diet-related diseases. Food marketing can be seen twice as much within the black and Latino youth than in non-Hispanic, according to data cited in a resolution adopted at the 2018 AMA Annual Meeting in Chicago.

Because children are unable to recognize that the advertising has persuasive intentions, it prevents the modification of their interpretation. This results in the increased consumption of nutrition poor foods.

“Children are constantly exposed to advertising for foods and beverages that are unhealthy and low in nutritional value, which can lead to increased consumption of these foods—putting them at higher risk for obesity and diet-related diseases,” said AMA Trustee Ryan J. Ribeira, MD, MPH.

“By limiting food ads targeted to children and teens, we will help reduce the amount of fast food and sugary beverages that they consume and ultimately improve health outcomes,” Dr. Ribeira said.

To address food advertising to youth, especially from vulnerable populations, the AMA House of Delegates (HOD) modified existing policy to:

- Support legislation that limits targeted marketing of products that do not meet nutritional standards as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture when such marketing targets youth, especially vulnerable populations.

The AMA also amended its policy on sex education in schools, saying that such programs should “include culturally competent materials that are language appropriate for Limited English Proficiency
pupils.”

“Comprehensive, evidence-based sex education helps promote healthy sexual relationships, lower rates of teenage pregnancy and reduce risky sexual behavior. Culturally competent sex education could reduce disparities in teenage pregnancy and HIV diagnosis rates—both of which are high in the Latino community,” said AMA Trustee Willarda V. Edwards, MD, MBA.

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