FACT SHEET: FOOD ADVERTISING GUIDELINES

1. Guidelines restricting advertising of food and beverages high in fat, sugar and salt to children will take effect from January 2015. This was announced by Associate Professor Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Health, at the Committee of Supply Debates.

Worrying Trend of Obesity

2. Singapore has been promoting healthy lifestyles for more than 20 years. We have made progress. For instance, more people are exercising. However obesity rates have been going up. Obesity increases the risks for diabetes, hypertension and heart disease. Prevention of childhood obesity is important, because overweight and obese children are likely to stay obese into adulthood.

3. Studies have shown that advertising influences children's food preferences, purchase requests and consumption patterns. Dietary habits of children are often formed well before the age of five and are very hard to change once children turn 11. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has also called for restrictions on the advertising of food and beverages that are high in fat, sugar or salt to children. In line with the WHO's recommendations, the Guidelines aim to promote healthier eating habits amongst children and help protect their health.

Consultation with stakeholders

4. The Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Health Promotion Board (HPB) engaged stakeholders across the media, advertising, retail and food industries, as well as relevant government and regulatory bodies. The stakeholders consulted supported the restrictions on food advertising to children.

5. Following the consultation with stakeholders, a public consultation exercise was conducted from 26 November to 28 December 2012. A total of 215 responses were received, with 50 per cent of respondents being parents or caregivers. More than 90 per cent of the respondents supported the introduction of restrictions to protect children from advertisements on food and beverages that are high in fat, sugar or salt.

Implementation of the Guidelines

6. Minister for Health, Gan Kim Yong, had announced at the Committee of Supply Debates last year that MOH and HPB, together with the Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore (ASAS), an Advisory Council to the Consumers Association of Singapore, will look into introducing a set of food advertising guidelines for children.

7. The Committee on Guidelines for Food Advertising to Children (The Committee) was subsequently established to develop the guidelines and an implementable framework for restricting food advertisements targeted at children in all media channels. The Guidelines will be incorporated into ASAS' Singapore Code of Advertising Practice for industry self-regulation.

8. Chairman of ASAS and chairperson of the Committee, Associate Prof Tan Sze Wee, said, "As the leader driving responsible advertising in Singapore, ASAS feels strongly that it is important that the business sector recognises their role in supporting the long term health

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2 http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/childhood/en/
and well-being of our children. We see this as a positive demonstration of public private partnership, with the industry working closely with ASAS, public agencies and stakeholders. This helps to ensure that the framework and guidelines being developed are feasible and clear so that advertising reaches out to the appropriate audience.

9. A set of uniform nutrient criteria covering both packaged food and food services is currently being developed and will be ready by September 2014. The uniform nutrient criteria will act as a framework that determines which food and beverage products can be advertised to children. As part of this development process, the committee reviewed existing nutrient criteria used in other pledge initiatives such as the European Union Pledge, and the Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative in the United States. The Committee will ensure that the nutrient criteria developed are relevant to the local context, underpinned by a firm scientific basis, and are clear and transparent to foster ease of implementation and monitoring.

10. Based on earlier consultations with industry partners, the food and media industries have agreed to a four-month grace period beginning from September to end December this year to adapt and ease into the requirements before the Guidelines are officially implemented in 2015. The Committee will establish a monitoring infrastructure to oversee compliance with the Guidelines. This will be administered by an independent third-party auditor.

Support from the industry

11. Since 2013, the food industry has initiated the Singapore Responsible Advertising to Children Pledge, a voluntary pledge to self-regulate advertising towards children. Under this Pledge, these companies will cease all advertising to children under the age of 12 unless the products fulfil nutrition criteria based on scientific evidence or international dietary guidelines and stop all commercial communication to children in primary schools, except where agreed by school administration for educational purposes. Currently, 14 companies have signed on to the Pledge. The Pledge will be in place until the Guidelines are implemented.

12. Mr Sunny Koh, Chairman, Health & Nutrition Workgroup, the Singapore Manufacturing Federation (SMF) and member of the Committee said, “SMF is pleased to be part of the Committee and to share industry expertise. The food and beverage industry is ready to help Singapore consumers make healthier food choices. Our members - large and small - are developing healthier product lines and using packaging to identify these healthier options. The Pledge made last year by 14 leading brands demonstrates the commitment by these companies to reduce children’s exposure to less healthy product ads - on TV, on the internet and in primary schools. Of course, advertising is just one part of this complex challenge. SMF remains committed to working with the various stakeholders in Singapore to seek new solutions. We will continue to support the Government while helping Singapore food and beverage companies to produce affordable, quality products.”