



Action on Sugar
Wolfson Institute of Population Health
Queen Mary University
Charterhouse Square
EC1M 6BQ

Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP
Secretary of State
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0EU

Call for the *Commercial Baby Food and Drink Guidelines* to be released

Dear Secretary of State,

We, alongside 16 infant, children and health NGOs, are writing to you to call for the urgent release of the Commercial Baby Food and Drink Guidelines. These guidelines are ready for release, having gone through a consultation process in 2020 and are needed now to ensure that young children have access to food and drinks that support their health and development.

There is a growing market of sweetened foods, marketed as suitable for children <36months, with manufacturers adding in unnecessary sugar, syrups and juices, and an abundance of fruit/mixed fruit marketed as first tastes with a lack of single vegetable flavours, contradicting NHS guidance.

As a result, children are being exposed to too much free sugars, and by the age of 1.5-3 years are consuming nearly 30g (7tsp) - the recommended maximum for an adult and 13.5g over the recommended maximum of 14g (5% daily dietary energy intake). The main contributor of free sugars in children aged 4-9 months old is commercial infant foods, in particular fruit-based and cereal-based food.

The over consumption of sugar is linked to an increase in calories, and therefore weight gain, with 1 in 3 children living with overweight or obesity by the time they leave primary school. Health conditions such as type 2 diabetes and hypertension are now increasingly appearing in children, having previously been conditions that affected adults exclusively. Excess sugar intake is also the main cause of tooth decay in children, and the most common reason for hospital admissions in children aged 6 and 10 years. It is unjust that a child should be diagnosed with and experience the pain associated with a wholly preventable dental disease.

Of 1,000 UK parents with children aged 6-36 months, 91% said they support the government in taking action to make sure all food and drinks available in the baby aisle are nutritionally appropriate according to NHS recommendations. Parents and children need to be supported for better health, and the food companies have a big role to play in this.

We know from previous policies such as the Sugar Reformulation Programme, that voluntary measures are not enough to create enough change. The Commercial Baby Food and Drink Guidelines are needed to improve the nutritional content and marketing of products to avoid misleading parents, and we urge you to make these guidelines mandatory to incentivise companies to comply.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Graham McGregor, Chairman, Action on Sugar

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

June O'Sullivan, CEO, London Early Years Foundation

Neil Leitch, CEO, Early Years Alliance

Katharine Jenner, Director, Obesity Health Alliance

Eddie Crouch, Chair, British Dental Association

Nigel Carter, Oral Health Foundation

Nigel Shattock, Director of Communications & Engagement, World Cancer Research Fund

Zoe McIntyre, Advocacy Manager, Food Foundation

Dr Jenny Harris, President, British Society of Paediatric Dentistry

Phil Pyatt, CEO, Blood Pressure UK

Diabetes UK

Edwina Revel, Programme Director, Early Start Nutrition

Professor Kevin Fenton, FPH President, Faculty of Public Health

Matthew Philpott, Executive Director, Health Equalities Group, Food Active

Dr Nicola Heslehurst, Chair, Association for the Study of Obesity

Dr Greenwall, The Dental Wellness Trust