POLICY & PRACTICE

Food Companies Limit Ads

Eleven of the country's largest food companies have announced plans to voluntarily limit advertisements and promotions to children younger than 12 years old. The steps were announced at a forum held by the Federal Trade Commission. The limits embraced by each company varied; McDonald's, for example, said all advertising aimed at those 12 years and under would further the goal of healthy dietary choices, and PepsiCo Inc. said it would promote only two products to children, and that the ads would emphasize active lifestyles. The efforts drew praise from consumer advocates. Margo Wootan, director of nutrition policy at the consumer advocacy group Center for Science in the Public Interest, said at a press conference that although CSPI was skeptical initially that the food companies would announce true limits, " We're thrilled the companies have done the right thing."

Most U.S. Babies Receive Screening

Nearly 88% of all babies born in the U.S.—more than double the percentage in 2005—live in states that require screening for at least 21 life-threatening disorders, according to the most recent March of Dimes newborn screening report card. A 2004 report of the American College of Medical Genetics called for every baby born in the United States to be screened for 29 genetic or functional disorders, ranging from sickle cell anemia to long-chain 3 hydroxyacyl CoA dehydrogenase deficiency (LCHAD). Two years ago, only 38% of infants were born in states that required screening for at least 21 of these 29 conditions.

Teens Steady on Drug Use, Sex

The percentages of 8th, 10th and 12th grade students reporting illicit drug use in the past 30 days remained stable from 2005 to 2006, although use among all three grades has declined since 1997, according to a report by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. In addition, the percentage of high school students reporting having had sexual intercourse (47%) stayed steady from 2003, although the percentage has declined from 54% since 1991. In other family statistics, the report said more family members are reading to toddlers: 60% of children aged 3-5 years were read to daily by a family member. But it also showed the percentage of low-birth-weight infants was up, as was the proportion of children aged 6-17 years who were overweight

Feds Release Medicaid Drug Rule

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has unveiled a new method of setting limits on what the federal government will reimburse state Medicaid agencies for prescription drug payments. As part of the new regulation, states will be required to collect information from physicians about prescription drugs administered in their offices so that the state can collect any rebates offered by drug manufacturers on those products. The final rule, which will take effect Oct. 1, is aimed at reigning in inflated drug product payments, CMS said. The regulation is expected to save states and the federal government $8.4 billion over the next 5 years, but even with the change, the Medicaid program still is expected to spend $140 billion for drugs over the same time period. The change is in part a reaction to a series of reports showing that Medicaid payments to pharmacies for generic drugs were much higher than what pharmacies actually were paying for the drugs. Pharmacies, the reports showed, made the most profit on those generic drugs with the highest markup, creating an incentive to dispense those drugs.

U.S. Lacks Pediatric Rheumatologists

There is a serious shortage of pediatric rheumatologists in the United States and a 75% increase in their numbers is needed to meet patient needs, according to a report from the Health Resources and Services Administration. There are fewer than 200 certified pediatric rheumatologists practicing in the United States and about 13 states have no pediatric rheumatologists. Children must travel 57 miles on average to see the nearest pediatric rheumatologist, compared with less than 25 miles for other pediatric specialists such as pediatric cardiologists or pediatric endocrinologists, according to the HRSA report. The HRSA findings confirm the existence of a shortage of pediatric rheumatologists and demonstrate the need for legislation to address the issue, according to the Arthritis Foundation. The group supports the Arthritis Prevention Control and Cure Act (S. 626/ H.R. 1283), which would authorize loan repayment programs for pediatric rheumatology and increase institutional training grants to support pediatric rheumatology. The HRSA report includes data from the American Board of Pediatrics, membership data from the American College of Rheumatology, the U.S. Census Bureau, a survey of pediatricians and rheumatologists, and a survey of pediatric residency directors.

—Jane Anderson