



AS IT IS

Mexico Targets Junk Food as Obesity Takes Toll Amid Pandemic

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Several Mexican states have proposed or approved bans on **junk food** sales to children. The country has one of the highest rates of childhood **obesity** as well as a high rate of death for young people.

The Gulf coast state of Tabasco passed restrictions on the sale of sugary bottled drinks and **snacks** that are high in **carbohydrates**. Oaxaca state was the first to use such a ban.

Lawmakers in several other states have introduced bills to do the same. Most of the bans would stop the sale of junk food to young people unless their parent is present.

In the northern state of Chihuahua, Representative Rene Frias introduced a bill “to **guarantee** our children and youths a healthier diet and to fight obesity...” The bill has not yet been voted on.

In Mexico City, Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum said earlier this month that leaders there are working to put together similar laws.

The issue has become important because of the coronavirus pandemic. Mexico has the third highest confirmed COVID-19 deaths in the world, behind the United States and Brazil.

The government has said that high blood pressure and obesity are the main conditions that may have caused the disease to become more severe.

Hugo López-Gatell is the government's main voice during the pandemic. He is a big supporter of the junk food ban, in part because about 50 percent of Mexico's deaths from the virus have been people under 65. He has blamed obesity and bad diets. He has described soft drinks as "bottled poison."

But what exactly is "junk food?" That is the main problem for the writers of the new laws. Oaxaca is still working on its list, mostly because there are a lot of traditional Mexican foods that have a lot of sugar, salt and **calories**.

The lawmakers want to avoid banning traditional sweet foods. Instead, they have blamed **packaged** foods made by major international companies.

For example, the Tabasco law used hard-to-understand language to avoid including traditional food.

The new laws may be hard to enforce. Some multi-national packaged foods, like Doritos corn **chips**, have become part of Mexico's food culture.

The U.N. Children's Fund says child obesity is a health emergency in Mexico. It says the country's children have the highest rate in the world of junk food eating. Many young people there get 40 percent of their total calories from junk food.

Business groups have complained about the effect the laws will have on tens of thousands of small stores and street businesses that make a lot of their money selling junk food. The business groups say it will create a new junk food black market.

I'm Susan Shand.

The Associated Press reported this story. Susan Shand adapted it for Learning English. Ashley Thompson was the editor.

Words in This Story

junk food - *n.* food that is usually very sweet and has little nutritional value

carbohydrate - *n.* a biomolecule that causes people to gain weight

guarantee - *v.* to make certain

transfat - *n.*

calorie - *n.* a unit of energy that causes the body to make fat

prohibition - *n.* to make something illegal to own or see
