

Press release

New report reveals Nestlé fails to put science first for infant milks

A new report by the Changing Markets Foundation and Globalization Monitor has revealed a lack of scientific consistency in the composition and claims of Nestlé's infant milks sold in 40 different countries.

The report *"Busting the myth of science-based formula"* investigated over 70 Nestlé infant milks for babies under 12 months old, sold in 40 different countries, to find out whether the company's self-proclaimed commitment to science was genuine. Ingredients and nutritional health claims for Nestlé infant milks seem to be primarily informed by marketing strategies instead of driven by scientific evidence.

Researchers found several products where Nestlé contradicts its own nutritional advice. On product labels sold in Brazil and Hong Kong the company advises parents against giving sucrose to infants, while two Nestlé infant milks in South Africa were found to contain the ingredient.¹ Similarly, some of Nestlé's infant milks sold in Hong Kong are marketed as healthier for not having *'any added vanilla flavour or flavourings for baby's good growth'*.² However, the investigation found several Nestlé products that contain vanilla flavouring in Hong Kong, China and in South Africa. These examples illustrate how Nestlé uses nutritional science as a marketing tool rather than applying it across all its products in the best interests of children's health.

The investigation also revealed that several of Nestlé's products claimed to be 'closest to breastmilk', which is prohibited by the WHO marketing code and subsequent resolutions and also rebutted by key scientific institutions,³ as breastmilk contains many live substances which cannot be technically copied in a manufactured product. Furthermore, all the products that claimed to be 'close to breastmilk' had major differences in their ingredients – further evidence that this is a marketing claim.

The report also exposes the company's strategy on premiumisation of products to convince parents into buying more expensive 'premium' products in the belief these are better for their child's health. It exposes strategies like social listening and market research, which give the company extensive insights into caregivers' worries and vulnerabilities and allows them to formulate and market their products accordingly.

"While we have come to understand that companies manipulate consumers' emotional responses to sell a variety of products, this behaviour is especially unethical when it comes to the health of vulnerable babies" said Nusa Urbancic from the Changing Markets Foundation. *"If the science is clear that an ingredient is safe and beneficial for babies then such ingredients should be in all products. If an ingredient is not healthy, such as sucrose, then it should be in no products. Anything other than this approach calls into serious question whether Nestlé is a company committed to science"*.

Commenting on the report, Nina Renshaw, Secretary-General of the European Public Health Alliance said, *"The findings highlight the vital importance of watertight legal frameworks to*

protect young children and their parents. The impending EU-wide ban on nutrition and health claims on infant milks is a key step in that direction, but this shows that governments and the World Health Organisation will still need to keep a watchful eye on companies' behaviour. Nothing should contribute to misleading people by idealising the use of infant milks, a key requirement of the WHO Code on marketing."

The report's authors are calling for the company to conduct an independent review of its global product range to ensure that only infant milks whose composition is based on the best, independently verified science are sold. Nestlé must respect the WHO Code and subsequent WHA resolutions regarding the appropriate and responsible marketing of infant milks, including a removal of nutrition and health claims from its products.

"Hong Kong's so-called free trade regime implies that marketed products, in particular infant milks, are much less regulated in comparison with the EU, thus making things difficult for the Hong Kong public to monitor the infant milk industry. This report reveals infant milk companies make use of the lack of public scrutiny in Hong Kong, not only selling products with the highest price but also adding non-essential ingredients to their products. It is very irresponsible of Nestlé to fail to put the health of infants first," said Rena Lau from Globalisation Monitor.

The report also asks policy-makers to strengthen and align global standards, and implement strong monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to prevent inconsistent practices by all infant milk manufacturers.

ENDS

For further information and interviews please contact:

Nusa Urbancic, Campaigns Director, Changing Markets Foundation, +44 7479 015 909 or nusa.urbancic@changingmarkets.org

Notes to Editor

We've put together a digital toolkit in the form of a Trello board where you'll find images, suggested copy, and other useful elements for digital and social media. Use this link to access the Trello board:

<https://trello.com/invite/b/RX4H1QS0/f535f84afe52a9a75b9b363c31012fc6/milking-it>

¹ European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) specifically advises against the addition of sucrose on the grounds that in some infants 'it can lead to severe symptoms, including poor feeding, vomiting and overall failure to thrive in some infants' and in healthy infants 'it may, because of their greater sweetness, increase the preference for sweet tastes in infants'. EFSA NDA Panel (EFSA Panel on Dietetic Products, Nutrition and Allergies) (2014). Scientific opinion on the essential composition of infant and follow-on formulae. EFSA Journal, 12(7): 3760–3866.

² European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) advises against the addition of unnecessary substances, which 'put a burden on the infant's metabolism' because they have to be

excreted. EFSA NDA Panel (2014). Scientific opinion on the essential composition of infant and follow-on formulae. *EFSA Journal*, 12(7): 3760–3866.

³ European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) advises against adding substances to formula just because these are present in breastmilk, without an appropriate understanding of the role they play in the development and health of formula-fed infants. Available online: <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/3760>