Predicting obesity reduction after implementing warning labels in Mexico: A modeling study

Rising consumption of ultra-processed foods (UPFs) and drinks is linked to increased caloric intake and is subsequently associated with weight gain. Many governments globally are introducing measures to improve the choices of consumers in a bid to reduce the consumption of unhealthy ultra-processed products. Mexico has introduced a number of interventions to discourage the consumption of unhealthy food and drink products, such as the tax on sugar sweetened beverages/nonessential highly caloric food, which was implemented in 2014. In October 2019, a new measure was approved in Mexico in a bid to improve consumer choices - the introduction of 'warning labels' on unhealthy products. These are required in all prepackaged food and beverages that add free sugars, fats, partially hydrogenated fats, or sodium. The warning label must state by law that these products include "excess of" calories, saturated fats, sodium, sugars, or trans fats.

The study aimed to estimate the potential reduction in obesity prevalence in adults in Mexico as a result of the implementation of warning labels on packaged products. The study used a simulation model to estimate the impact to reduction of: calories, body mass index, and obesity prevalence, and then estimated the economic impact of this and the potential savings.

Results of the study include estimates that the introduction of warning labels on packaged products could result in a mean caloric reduction of 36.8kcal/day/person, a mean reduction of 1.68kg body weight, a reduction of 1.3 million cases of obesity in Mexico, and estimated savings of as much as US $1.8billion.

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