

Public health, nutrition experts call on companies to stop misleading labeling of 'toddler milks'

July 28 2020, by Kristin Messina



Marketing claims made about the health benefits of infant formula and toddler milks aren't supported by science. Credit: Rudd Center

On Tuesday, July 28, leading nutrition experts, child health organizations

and advocates, and researchers—including the UConn Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity—petitioned the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to establish regulations for labeling products sold as "toddler milks" (also known as "toddler formula" or "toddler drinks"). They recommended additional regulations to ensure that caregivers are not misled into purchasing nutritionally inferior and unnecessary products for their infants and toddlers.

Child health experts do not recommend serving toddler milks to young children. Most toddler milks consist of non-fat dried milk, added sugars (like corn syrup solids), and vegetable oil. They contain more sodium and less protein than plain milk, and they can cost four times as much. Yet from 2016 to 2015, advertising spending on toddler milks increased four-fold, and volume sales increased 2.6 times.

Furthermore, current labeling of toddler milks confuses consumers and misleads parents to believe these drinks are nutritious and necessary for young children.

- Consumers often confuse toddler milk with infant formula because their packages look similar, and some caregivers mistakenly give toddler milk to their infants—which can be dangerous.
- Formula companies have introduced another category of "transition" formulas that they say are for infants and toddlers (9-24 months old), but these products are simply repackaged infant formula, which is not appropriate to serve children older than 12 months.
- The claims on toddler milk packages imply numerous benefits for toddlers' nutrition, [cognitive development](#) and growth, but there is no scientific evidence to support these claims.

"Sugar-sweetened toddler milks with labels that imply these products are

necessary to meet the nutritional needs of young children is the perfect recipe to increase formula company profits—but the wrong recipe for children's nutrition and long-term health," says Jennifer L. Harris, Ph.D., MBA, one of the experts and senior research advisor at the Rudd Center. "The FDA must establish regulations to ensure that companies can no longer mislead consumers to believe that [toddler](#) milks are beneficial for young children."

Specifically, the petition calls on the FDA to:

- Enforce current regulations against misbranded "transition formula" products represented or purported to be for children 9 to more than 12 months of age;
- Amend current regulations to expressly prohibit the use of the term "[infant formula](#)" or "[formula](#)" on any drink products represented or purported to be for use by children more than 12 months old; and
- Amend current regulations to establish a common name for nonstandardized beverages represented to be for use by children 12 to 36 months old, and to require disclaimers to clarify age of use and proper nutrition for young [children](#).

The citizen petition was submitted to the FDA on July 28, 2020. It was signed by 30 child nutrition experts, representing academic, public health, and advocacy organizations.

Provided by University of Connecticut

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