



**Executive Summary on the
Direct Observation of Marketing Practices at Points-of-
sale Selling
Formula Milk for Children up to the age 36 months and
Formula Milk Related Products in Hong Kong**

Family Health Service

Department of Health





Executive Summary

Background

To protect breastfeeding from being undermined by inappropriate marketing, the World Health Organization (WHO) adopted the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes (the International Code) in 1981 and the subsequent relevant Health Assembly resolutions, there should be no advertising or other form of promotion to the general public of breast-milk substitutes, and the related products including feeding bottles and teats.

The Family Health Service (FHS) of the Department of Health (DH) commissioned Consumer Search Hong Kong Limited (CSG) to conduct a study to observe the marketing practices at points-of-sale selling formula milk for children up to the age of 36 months or formula milk related products (feeding bottle and/or teat) (the “study”) with a view to assessing the local marketing situation.

Study Objective

The objective was to observe the points-of-sale's marketing practices of formula milk targeted at infants and young children up to the age of 36 months and formula milk related products in Hong Kong.

Methodology

The study covered 50 points-of-sale (POS) in Hong Kong, including 12 supermarkets, 5 personal stores, 12 department stores/ baby stores, 18 pharmacies/ drug stores, and 3 other retail stores (e.g. cosmetics store and miscellaneous grocery store), which were engaged in the selling of any formula milk targeted at infants and young children up to the age of 36 months or formula milk related products.

The study was conducted by direct observation in POS distributed in the Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and New Territories East and West regions between 2 October and 6 November 2015.

An observational checklist designed with reference to the local marketing practice and the International Code was used for recording the findings made by the observers. The observers were instructed to record the presence of the following 6 marketing practices in the POS:

- (i) Presence of Point-of Sale Advertising
- (ii) Use of Sales Inducement Devices
- (iii) Giving out sample(s) of formula milk or formula milk related products to customers/potential customers



- (iv) Giving out promotional gift(s) to potential customers without purchasing formula milk or formula milk related products
- (v) Seeking contact of potential customers (pregnant women/fathers/mothers) directly and its purpose and format
- (vi) Seeking contact of potential customers (pregnant women/fathers/mothers) indirectly and its purpose and format

A pilot study was conducted on 7 September 2015 and 9 September 2015 in a supermarket, a baby store and a pharmacy prior to the actual fieldwork. Adjustments to the content of the checklist were made prior to conducting the main actual fieldwork.

The fieldwork was carried out between 2 October and 6 November 2015 by 2 observers and 1 assistant supervisor at each POS.

The completed checklists were coded, the dataset was validated and possible outliers were cross checked.

Study Findings

Presence of Marketing and/or Promotional Activities for Formula Milk and Formula Milk Related Products

49 of the 50 POS visited (98.0%) were observed to have marketing and/or promotional activities for formula milk and/or formula milk related products.

Marketing Practices of Formula Milk

- (a) Point-of-sale advertising items and use of sales inducement devices were prevalent. Distribution of samples was observed in 1 POS. The provision of promotional gifts without purchase, and the seeking of contact directly or indirectly with potential customers were not found.
- (b) A total of 321 occurrences of point-of-sale advertising were observed in 33 POS including 17 pharmacies/ drug stores (171 occurrences), 5 personal stores (77 occurrences), 5 department stores/ baby stores (48 occurrences), 4 supermarkets (21 occurrences) and other 2 retail stores (4 occurrences).
 - (i) The point-of-sale advertising items involved 17 brands of formula milk, with 3 brands of formula milk covering over 60% of the advertising items. More than half of the advertising items (195 occurrences, 60.7%) involved formula milk for children aged 12 to 36 months, followed by those for children aged 6 to 12 months (123 occurrences, 38.3%). There were 3 advertising items (0.9%) from 3 different brands that involved formula milk for children aged 0 to 6 months.



- (ii) Common types of point-of-sale advertising items observed included wobblers/ special display at price label (12 brands), followed by special display of product (9 brands).
- (c) A total of 425 occurrences of sales inducement devices were observed in 26 POS including 10 supermarkets (155 occurrences), 5 personal stores (147 occurrences), 5 department stores/ baby stores (103 occurrences), 4 pharmacies/ drug stores (14 occurrences) and 2 other retail stores (6 occurrences).
 - (i) 18 brands were observed to carry sales inducement devices and the majority (97.4%) targeted at children aged 6 to 36 months. There were 8 (1.9%) occurrences from 6 different brands and 3 (0.7%) occurrences from 1 brand found in formula milk targeted at children aged 0 to 6 months and aged 0 to 12 months respectively.
 - (ii) Common types of sales inducement device found included price discount involving 18 brands (266 occurrences, 62.6%), followed by provision of gift with purchase of formula milk from 8 brands (87 occurrences, 20.5%).
- (d) Only 1 pharmacy/ drug store was observed to provide samples of formula milk to potential customers. The targeted age range of the samples was 6 to 12 months.
- (e) Seeking contact and obtaining personal details directly or indirectly from potential customers were not found during our observation.

Marketing Practices of Formula Milk Related Products (Feeding Bottles and Teats)

- (a) Out of the 6 types of marketing practices, only point-of-sale advertising items and sales inducement devices were observed, whilst provision of sample, gift and seeking of contact directly or indirectly of potential customers were not found.
- (b) A total of 50 occurrences of point-of-sale advertising items were observed in 10 POS including 9 department stores/ baby stores (49 occurrences) and a supermarket (1 occurrence).
 - (i) The point-of-sale advertising items involved 17 brands of formula milk related products.
 - (ii) The commonest point-of-sale advertising item was special display of product which was found in 11 brands (32 occurrences, 64.0%).
- (c) A total of 92 occurrences of sales inducement devices were observed in 12 POS including 9 department stores/ baby stores (83 occurrences) and 3 personal stores (9 occurrences).
 - (i) Sales inducement devices involved 18 brands of formula milk related products (15 brands of feeding bottles and 14 brands of teats).



- (ii) Common types of sales inducement device included price discount for 16 brands (76 items, 82.6%), followed by tie-in sale for 5 brands (11 items, 12.0%).

Conclusion

Many brands of formula milk for children up to the age of 36 months and formula milk related products were commonly found to have marketing and / or promotional activities in local POS. The activities mainly involved products targeted at children aged 6 months or over, but a minority of marketing and/or promotional activities targeted at children aged 0 and above were also observed.

Marketing practices were observed in different categories of POS including supermarkets, pharmacies/ drug stores, personal stores, department stores/baby stores.

For marketing practices related to formula milk, pharmacies/ drug stores were observed to have a lot of point-of-sale advertising items, whilst supermarkets, personal stores, department stores and baby stores used more sales inducement devices.

For marketing practices related to formula milk related products, use of sales inducement device was more pervasive than point-of-sale advertising items.

Distribution of samples and promotional gifts without purchase of products was not common in this study, and seeking personal details of potential consumer directly or indirectly as a marketing practice were not observed.

Multiple factors affect mothers' decision to initiate and sustain breastfeeding. Nonetheless, prevalent marketing practices of formula milk and formula milk related products do not aid in fostering a promotive and supportive breastfeeding community. According to the principles of the International Code and the subsequent relevant Health Assembly's resolutions, steps should be taken to ensure that there should be no advertising, or any form of promotional activities to promote formula milk for children under 36 months and its related products, and relevant traders should be encouraged to regard themselves as responsible for monitoring their sales practice.