Mexico Will Give Junk Food Warning Labels; The US, EU, and Others are Opposed

In October, the Mexican government will require warning labels on the front of sugary, processed junk food describing the health risks of choosing these products. The regulation as passed in October of 2019, and now the United States, Canada, the European Union, and Switzerland are asking the country to delay implementing those labels. The U.S. and the E.U. are asking for 2 years, Canada is asking for a year, and Switzerland has not specified a date for the postponement to end. COVID-19 is cited as a reason for the delay. Additionally, the United States delegation questioned Mexico's new initiative at a World Trade Organization meeting in May, including statements that the new regulations…

> *…may be more trade restrictive than necessary…" and "may not be based on robust scientific evidence…" and "does not appear to consider relevant international standards…" and "may contribute to consumer confusion…."*
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> *U.S. delegation to the WTO, May 2020*

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Mexico has been dealing with a severe obesity epidemic for over twenty years, a problem that was exacerbated when NAFTA allowed an increased amount of processed junk food to flood the country. Mexico is the most overweight nation in Latin America, where 64% of people have a body mass index of more than 25%, and as of 2016, 10% of the population has diabetes. In 2017, diabetes claimed the lives of twice of 80,000 Mexicans, twice the number of those killed in homicides. Front

of package nutritional labels have been endorsed by the World Health Organization, and Mexico plans to also ban cartoon characters targeted at children from junk food.

This is not the first time the United States has aligned itself with the junk food industry in opposition to public health initiatives. The much-criticized NAFTA, which bears responsibility for the increased access to junk food in Mexico, was renegotiated in 2018. In those negotiations, the Office of the United States Trade Representative pushed to keep Mexico and Canada from being able to add labels denoting there was a hazard in consuming a product.

Mexican regulations requiring mandatory labels that describe the health risks of processed foods on the front of processed products are due to be implemented in October, and major governments like the U.S., Canada, and the European Union are now asking Mexico to delay the implementation of the rule.

Reuters obtained information from a Mexican government official who wished to remain anonymous. According to them, the Mexican government intends to continue with its plans.

> *“We told them there would be no additional time.”*
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> *Reuters*

The government official also indicated that major food companies like Coca-Cola, Pepsi, and Nestle were also asking for the regulations to be delayed.