

VIA SATELLITE



Life

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15, 1989

Quick meals for kids to zap

By Anita Manning
USA TODAY

The new wave in microwave: zap-it-yourself meals for small fry.

Micro meals for 6- to 14-year-olds are but a few months away in most cities.

Preservative-free and seasoned to suit younger palates, new offerings include such kiddie favorites as spaghetti and meatballs and ravioli.

Packaged with simple instructions, spill-proof lids and plastic trays that prevent burning, they're designed so kids — at least those over 8 or 9 — can fix them without supervision.

"This is the first generation to grow up with microwave ovens in the home (75 percent of families have them)," says Bill Pizek, Campbell's marketing research manager. Campbell has eight microwave soup-and-sandwich combos in markets from Pittsburgh to Omaha, and will expand this fall.

"They can do Nintendo better than most adults," he says. "The microwave is a lot easier than that."

A national survey by Children's Market Research, New York, found 81 percent of kids 6-14 are microwave-fluent.

"It's not just latchkey kids," says Selina Guber, CMR president. Kids use the ovens "for convenience, as a time-saver."

Among newcomers aiming to upstage the microwaveable burgers, fries, sandwiches and shakes now available:

► **Hormel's Kid's Kitchen.** Spaghetti and meatballs, chicken chow mein, beef ravioli and four others are shelf-stable — they're sealed in plastic and don't need refrigeration. Even without preservatives, they can stay in the cupboard for 18 months. Prices: \$1.09-\$1.19. They're sold in Colorado, Arizona and Indiana, will be available nationally in 1990.

► **Banquet's Kid Cuisine.** Frozen dinners that include a main dish, fruit, vegetable and dessert — and a Funpak activity card with stickers — have the appeal of a fast-food kids' meal without the car ride. Price: about \$1.89. They'll be tested in Dallas, Denver, Fort Wayne, Ind., Indianapolis and Salt Lake City this summer and elsewhere this fall.

The idea for kids' microwaveable meals originated in 1986 with My Own Meals, a line of \$2.39-\$2.99 shelf-stable kiddie meals to be prepared by an adult. They're available by mail (P.O. Box 334, Deerfield, Ill. 60015) or in stores in Illinois, Wisconsin and Indiana, and will expand into western Ohio next week.