



DEBATE PACK

Number CDP 2018/0012, 15 January 2018

The effect of junk food advertising on obesity in children

This pack has been prepared ahead of the debate to be held in Westminster Hall on Tuesday 16 January 2018 from 9.30-11am on the effect of junk food advertising on obesity in children. The subject for the debate has been selected by the Backbench Business Committee and the debate will be opened by Maggie Throup MP.

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

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1. Childhood obesity in the UK

Data on childhood obesity is gathered and reported separately for all countries in the UK. Data recording varies in definitions and level of detail. Therefore, this data is not directly comparable.

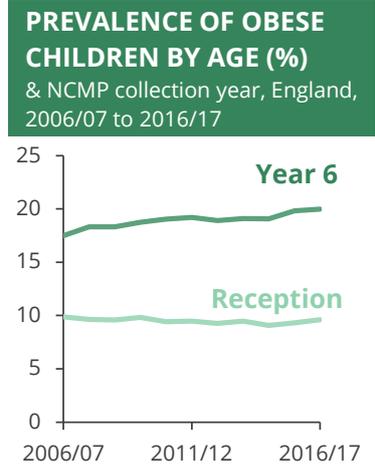
England

Information on children’s obesity in England is available in the [National Child Measurement Programme \(NCMP\) - England, 2016-17](#).

The level of obesity among children has increased since 2006/07 for year six from 17.5% to 20.0% but remained fairly stable for reception at around 10% in 2016/17.

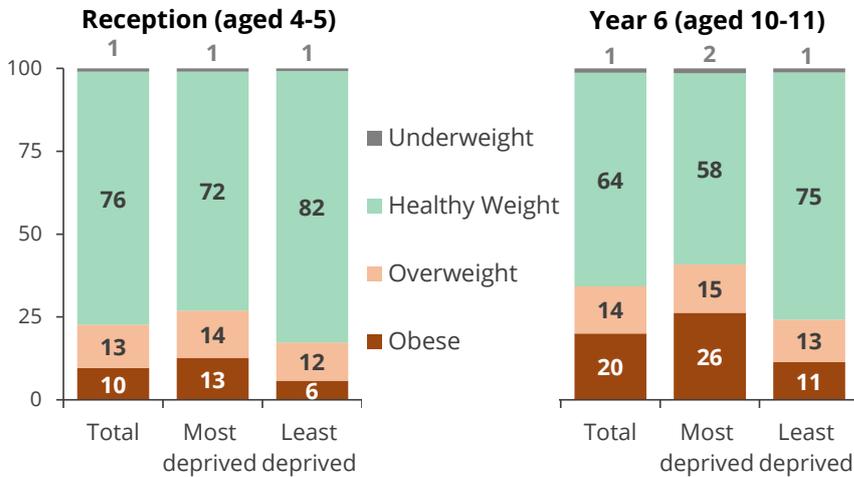
In 2016/17, around 23% of reception children were overweight including obese, compared to 34% of those in year six. Obesity prevalence was higher for boys than girls in both age groups.

Children living in the most deprived areas were twice as likely to be obese that of those living in the least deprived areas for both reception and year six in 2016/17.



Source: NHS Digital, [National Child Measurement Programme - England 2016-17, Table 1b](#), 19 October 2017

WEIGHT CONDITION BY AGE AND DEPRIVATION, ENGLAND, 2016/17 (%)



Source: NHS Digital, [National Child Measurement Programme - England 2016-17, Table 6a](#), 19 October 2017

[NCMP Local Authority Profile](#) tool allows comparing geographic areas in England. For reception the lowest level of obesity was recorded in Kingston-upon-Thames (4.8%) and the highest in Wolverhampton (13.5%) in 2016/17. Among year six the range was from 11.3% in Rutland, to 29.2% in Barking and Dagenham.

Wales

Information about children obesity in Wales is available in [Child Measurement Programme for Wales 2015/16](#) published by the [Public Health Wales](#).

The latest data for 2015/16 suggest that 11.7% of children aged 4-5 in were obese, and a further 14.5% are overweight. This was similar to obesity and overweight rates in 2014/15.



Source: Public Health Wales, [Child Measurement Programme for Wales: Current Annual Report](#), 26 April 2017

In Wales around 13.5% of children in the most deprived areas were obese compared with 8.8% in the least deprived.

Childhood obesity rates were lowest in the Cardiff & Vale of Glamorgan health area (9.1%), and highest in Cwm Taf (14.6%), which includes Merthyr Tydfil (17.8%) and Rhondda Cynon Taf (13.8%).

Scotland

There is no equivalent to National Child Measurement Programme in Scotland, but data on children at risk of obesity is published in the [Scottish Health Survey](#). It is based on similar categories as the English and Welsh measurement programmes discussed above, but with different labels: a child with a BMI above the 95th percentile of expected is described 'at risk of obesity' where the English and Welsh data describes them as 'obese'.

In 2016, around 14% of children in Scotland age 2-15 were 'at risk of obesity' and 15% were overweight.

Combined 2015 and 2016 data shows that 16% of children in most deprived areas were obese, compared to 12% of those in least deprived areas. Similarly, 17% of most deprived children were overweight, in contrast to 13% of the least deprived.

Northern Ireland

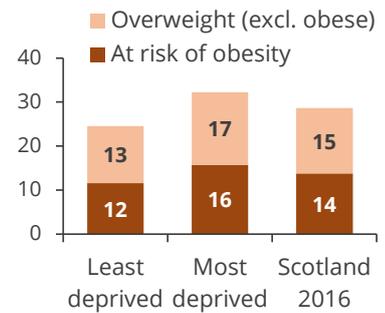
Data on children obesity in Northern Ireland is available in [Health Survey Northern Ireland](#) published by [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#) and [Department of Health \(Northern Ireland\)](#).

Childhood obesity in Northern Ireland, as reported in the Health Survey 2016/17, covers children aged 2-15. It does not report weight data by deprivation subgroups as in England, Scotland and Wales.

In 2016/17, 8% of children in Northern Ireland were obese, and 17% overweight. Boys were more likely to be obese.

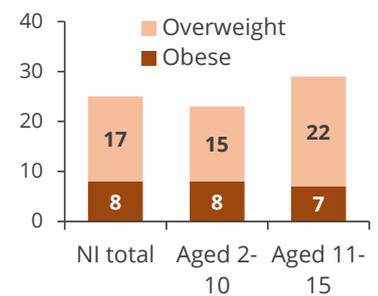
Around 8% of those aged 2-10 were obese and a further 15% overweight, making a total of 23% who were either overweight or obese.

WEIGHT BY DEPRIVATION
Aged 2-15, Scotland, 2015 & 16 (%)



Source: Scottish Government, [Scottish Health Survey 2016](#), 3 October 2017

WEIGHT BY AGE
Northern Ireland, 2016/ 17 (%)



Source: Department of Health (Northern Ireland), [Health Survey Northern Ireland](#), 24 October 2017

2. Advertising high fat, salt and sugar foods

There are controls on advertising for high fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) foods in both broadcast and non-broadcast media in the UK.

A Commons Library briefing paper, [Advertising to children](#), provides more general information on advertising and children.

Please note that this briefing focuses narrowly on issues around the advertising of HFSS products. It does not consider other wider factors and Government policies that may impact on childhood obesity rates.

2.1 Broadcast media

A ban on the advertising of HFSS foods during children's airtime and during programmes where there is a disproportionately high child audience was introduced in the UK in 2007. More information about the restrictions was set out in an Ofcom report:

Accordingly, the following package of measures to restrict the scheduling of television advertising of food and drink products to children will be applied:

1. scheduling restrictions will be confined to food and drink products that are assessed as HFSS [high in fat, salt and sugar] as defined by the FSA's nutrient profiling scheme;
2. advertisements for HFSS products must not be shown in or around programmes specifically made for children (which includes pre-school children). For the avoidance of doubt this measure will remove all HFSS advertising from dedicated children's channels;
3. advertisements for HFSS products must not be shown in or around programmes of particular appeal to children under 16; and
4. these restrictions will apply equally to programme sponsorship by HFSS food and drink products.¹

Ofcom noted that a number of consumer groups and health organisations had called for a ban on advertising HFSS foods prior to the 9pm watershed.

In 2010, Ofcom published a [final review](#) of HFSS advertising restrictions (introduced in 2007) on children's airtime. At this time, it estimated that children had seen less HFSS advertising than before the ban.

It said that it considered it "appropriate to maintain the current restrictions, but not to extend them." Ofcom stated that the reasons for not extending were the same as those set out in a 2006 statement, in which it said a 9pm watershed ban would be a "disproportionate response:"

Many consultation respondents, including the Food Standards Agency, the Children's Commissioner, consumer bodies, health

¹ Ofcom, [Television Advertising of Food and Drink Products to Children Executive Summary](#), 2007

organisations and individuals, called for a ban on food and drink advertising before the 9pm watershed

While a 9pm watershed ban would remove a large number of HFSS advertisements from television, when compared to other potential restrictions much of its effect would fall on programmes of primary appeal to adults rather than children. Audience data for 2005 demonstrates that, on average, under 16 year olds watching programmes on ITV1, Channel 4 or five between 6pm and the 9pm watershed are outnumbered nine-to-one by viewers over the age of 16.

A 9pm watershed ban would also significantly reduce broadcaster revenues, to an extent inconsistent with a proportionate approach. The total potential revenue involved could be more than £250m per year; a figure which exceeds the entire UK commercial television industry's investment in all children's television and all national news coverage combined.

In light of this and other evidence, and after carefully reviewing all consultation responses, Ofcom has concluded that a 9pm watershed ban would be a disproportionate approach, particularly when compared to Ofcom's preferred focus on HFSS advertising around programmes and on channels of particular appeal to under-16s.²

2.2 Non-broadcast media

Changes were introduced to the advertising of HFSS products on non-broadcast media in July 2017. The new measures apply across all non-broadcast media, including print, online and social media. The Committee on Advertising Practice (CAP) provide a summary of the new measures on its website:

1. Ads that directly or indirectly promote an HFSS product cannot appear in children's media
2. Ads for HFSS products cannot appear in other media where children make up over 25% of the audience
3. Ads for HFSS products will not be allowed to use promotions, licensed characters and celebrities popular with children; advertisers may now use those techniques to better promote healthier options
4. The Department of Health nutrient profiling model will be used to classify which products are HFSS.³

More detailed information on advertising food and drink to children is provided in a [June 2017 CAP guidance note](#).

² Ofcom, [New restrictions on the television advertising of food and drink products to children](#), November 2006

³ CAP, [Food and soft drink advertising to children consultation and regulatory statement \(CAP\)](#), December 2016

3. The Government childhood Obesity plan and HFSS foods advertising

3.1 Background

An October 2015 Public Health England (PHE) report, [Sugar Reduction: The evidence for action](#) outlined the findings of a review on the evidence on interventions to reduce sugar consumption. The report states that no single action would be effective in reducing sugar intake. It recommended a broad range of different measures. This included a reduction of price promotions in shops, a reduction in opportunities to advertise and market HFSS foods to children, a sugar reduction programme, and a levy on sugary soft drinks.⁴

In relation to the advertising of high sugar foods, PHE included the following recommendations:

It is likely that taking a broad range of actions on marketing and promotions would reduce purchase and therefore consumption of higher sugar foods and drinks, helping to lower sugar intakes and improve diets. This could include:

[..] reducing exposure to marketing by setting broader and deeper controls on advertising of high sugar foods and drinks to children. This could be achieved through a range of more specific activity including:

1. extending current restrictions to apply across the full range of programmes that children are likely to watch as opposed to limiting this to just children's specific programming
2. extending current restrictions on advertising to apply across all other forms of broadcast media, social media and advertising (including in cinemas, on posters, in print, online and advergames)
3. limiting the techniques that can be used to engage with children, including plugging the 'loopholes' that currently exist around the use of unlicensed but commonly recognised cartoon characters and celebrity endorsement within children's advertising
4. tightening the current nutrient profiling model that governs what can be advertised
5. consider limiting brand advertising of well recognised less healthy products including through restrictions on sponsorship on eg sporting events.⁵

New ASA rules restricting the advertising of HFSS foods on non-broadcast media (discussed in section 2.2) implemented some of the measures highlighted above.

A Health Committee Inquiry report, *Childhood Obesity: Brave and bold action*, published in November 2015 also made a number of

⁴ PHE, [Sugar Reduction: The evidence for action](#), October 2015

⁵ PHE, [Sugar Reduction: The evidence for action](#) October 2015 (pg 25),

recommendations on tackling childhood obesity. The Committee endorsed the recommendation of PHE with regards to advertising. More information can be found in the Committee report.⁶

3.2 The Government's plan

The Government's childhood obesity plan was published in August 2016.⁷

The plan did not introduce plans to further restrict the advertising of HFSS foods, but did include a commitment to reviewing and updating the nutrient profile. This is the tool on which decisions relating to restrictions on food and drink advertising are based.

Other measures introduced by the plan included:

- A Public Health England (PHE) reformulation programme to reduce the sugar in foods aimed at children;
- Recommitment to the healthy start voucher scheme enabling low-income families to buy fruit and vegetables;
- Action to increase physical activity in schools;
- The soft drinks industry levy to apply to manufacturers and importers of added sugar soft drinks;
- Reassessment of school foods standards;
- A review of food labelling;
- Promotion of the use of technology to aid healthy choices; and
- A review of health professional training and education on obesity and nutrition.

3.3 Response to the plan

Stakeholders and commentators welcomed the introduction of the soft drinks industry levy and a reformulation programme on high sugar foods, but were disappointed that some measures recommended by Public Health England had not been included.^{8,9}

These measures (present in a leaked draft of the plan) included controls on price promotions and stricter rules on advertising and marketing high fat, salt and sugar foods. The Government described the plan as the beginning of a conversation and said further action could be taken once progress had been assessed.

⁶ House of Commons Health Committee, [Childhood obesity—brave and bold action. First Report of Session 2015–16](#), November 2015

⁷ Department of Health, [Guidance: Childhood obesity: a plan for action](#), August 2016

⁸ RCPCH, [RCPCH responds to 'weak' child obesity plan](#), 18 August 2016

⁹ Faculty of Public Health, [Childhood obesity plan lets down children](#), August 2016

4. Scottish Government draft obesity strategy

In October 2017, the Scottish Government published a draft obesity strategy for consultation, [A Healthier Future – Action and Ambitions on Diet, Activity and Healthy Weight](#).

The Scottish Government provided the following information about the plan and its proposals, which covers junk food advertising:

Tackling obesity has already been identified as a priority in Programme for Government with key commitments to limit the marketing of food high in fat, sugar and salt and provide more support for people with type 2 diabetes to lose weight. In launching the consultation, the Government announced funding of £42 million over the next 5 years to expand these services.

Other proposals include:

1. action on junk food advertising
2. action on food purchases for consumption outside the home
3. preventative services including information, advice and support for children and families on healthy eating
4. practical support for small & medium sized food manufacturers to reformulate and develop healthier products
5. a range of opportunities for people to be more active
6. working with the public sector and a wide range of partners to support local improvement work on diet & weight.¹⁰

The document acknowledges that broadcast advertising is a reserved matter. It states that the Scottish Government will “strongly press” the UK Government to introduce a ban on HFSS foods on television prior to the watershed, and that if the UK Government will not act they will request the powers on this issue to be devolved.¹¹

¹⁰ Scottish Government, A healthier future - action and ambitions on diet, activity and healthy weight, October 2017

¹¹ Scottish Government, [A Healthier Future – Action and Ambitions on Diet, Activity and Healthy Weight Consultation Document](#) (pg 7), October 2017

5. Views on a change to advertising rules on HFSS foods

Health organisations, such as the Obesity Health Alliance, have said that an extension to broadcast rules on HFSS products to prevent advertising prior to the 9pm watershed would protect children further from the impact of these adverts and contribute to reducing childhood obesity.¹² They argue that large numbers of children watch family programmes and are exposed to significant advertising of HFSS products and this has an impact on what they eat, and request from their parents.¹³

In contrast, the advertising regulator, the Committees of Advertising Practice has asserted that the public health benefits of a further restriction are uncertain, that the cost of the regulation is too great and that a change would represent an “unwarranted restriction on programming watched by adults and on commercial free speech.”¹⁴

5.1 Studies on children’s exposure and impacts of HFSS advertising

There are no official statistics on high fat, sugar or salt (HFSS) food product advertising and its effects. This section presents data from recent studies.

Children’s exposure to adverts

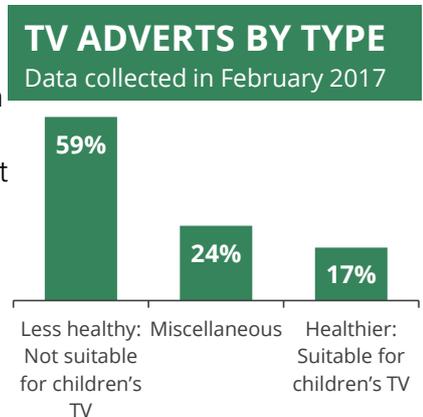
Data on children’s exposure to HFSS adverts is available in a [Liverpool University study](#) commissioned by the [Obesity Health Alliance](#) (an organisation that supports a ban on HFSS food adverts prior to the 9pm watershed). This research examined how many HFSS adverts are shown during programs most watched by children. Key findings suggested that (bold retained from original):

“The majority (59%) of food and drink adverts shown during family viewing time would be banned from children’s TV, yet hundreds of thousands of children are exposed to these ads every week.

In the worst case example, children were bombarded with **nine HFSS adverts in just a 30 minute period.**

Adverts for **fruit and vegetables made up just over 1%** of food and drink adverts shown during family viewing time.

Adverts for fast food and takeaways appeared more than twice as often as any other type of food and drink adverts – largely due to their tactic of sponsoring popular family shows.”¹⁵



Source: Obesity Health Alliance, [A 'Watershed' Moment: Why it's Prime Time to Protect Children from Junk Food Adverts](#), Obesity Health Alliance, 28 November 2017

¹² Obesity Health Alliance, [A 'Watershed' Moment: Why it's Prime Time to Protect Children from Junk Food Adverts](#), 28 November 2017

¹³ Obesity Health Alliance, [Westminster Hall Debate: "This House has considered the impact of junk food marketing on children's obesity"](#) Tuesday 16th January 2018, [9:30am MP Briefing](#), 9 January 2018

¹⁴ House of Commons Health committee, [Childhood obesity: follow-up Seventh Report of Session 2016–17, March 2017](#)

¹⁵ Obesity Health Alliance, [A 'Watershed' Moment: Why it's Prime Time to Protect Children from Junk Food Adverts](#), 28 November 2017

Spending on HFSS food advertising

The Obesity Health Alliance has also undertaken analysis of advertising spending, based on data from TheGrocer.co.uk website. In October 2017 it reported that:

Latest figures show that:

- The top 18 spending crisp, confectionary and sugary drinks brands put over £143 million a year into advertising
- Government spent £5.2m last year on its Change4Life healthy eating campaign
- The NHS spends an estimated £38 million a year on weight loss surgery – although surgery can be cost saving in the longer term
- Treating obesity relating conditions is estimated to cost the NHS £5.1 billion a year.^{16 17}

Public Health England report, Sugar Reduction: The evidence for action, published in 2015 suggested that:

“In 2014, the UK food industry spent £256 million promoting unhealthy foods sold in retail alone”¹⁸

Effects of HFSS adverts

Public Health England has provided a summary of key findings in HFSS food studies published between 2010 and 2015. This information is available in the [Sugar Reduction: The evidence for action](#) report [Annex 3: A mixed method review of behaviour changes resulting from marketing strategies targeted at high sugar food and non-alcoholic drinks](#). PHE made the following conclusion on the evidence in this area:

Findings from this review, support evidence from previous systematic reviews to suggest that marketing is effective in influencing the purchase and consumption of high sugar foods. Unsurprisingly much of the research evidence focuses on children, given they lack an adult’s understanding of advertising intent, and are therefore considered more vulnerable to the impact of marketing. While current evidence suggests that advertising, advergames, discounting, use of character branding, product size and supermarket product placement can influence high sugar product selection or consumption, much of the research evidence is reliant on small scale, low to moderate quality experimental/controlled studies from outside of the UK. Although TV remains a dominant marketing channel, there are also several emerging and new marketing strategies such as sponsorship, integrated, digital and online marketing that require further research.¹⁹

¹⁶ OHA, [Press release: Health costs of obesity soaring as junk food companies pour millions into advertising](#), 11 October 2017

¹⁷ This analysis was based on data from TheGrocer.co.uk website. A complete list of top 100 companies by advertising spending is available online: [Top 100 Advertising Spend: FMCG Brands](#)

¹⁸ Public Health England, [Sugar Reduction: The evidence for action](#) report Annex 3, pp. 7-8, October 2015

¹⁹ Public Health England, [Sugar Reduction: The evidence for action](#) report Annex 3, pp. 7-8, October 2015

Research published by VoxEU.org – the Centre for Economic Policy Research’s policy portal suggested that if HFSS product adverts were banned:

“...and firms did not respond by changing prices the total quantity of crisps sold would fall by around 15% – leading to similar falls in energy, saturated fat and salt from crisps. These health gains would be partially mitigated by people switching to other junk food (confectionery, for example), and we found that switching to other junk foods would be stronger than towards healthy snacks.”²⁰

A report published in October 2017, [Ad Brake: Primary School children’s perceptions of unhealthy food advertising on TV](#), presented the findings of qualitative research undertaken by the National Centre for Social Research on behalf of Cancer Research UK. This study involved conducting 25 focus groups across 6 UK primary schools. The report sets out the key findings (bold retained from original):

- Children are watching junk food adverts in the evenings and on weekends during family programmes, exposing the loophole in the current legislation.

“I watch TV with my dad about seven o’clock because my, because my dad’s not there in the day and I’m at school and that’s the only times we really watch it together.”

Girl, Year 4b

- TV advertising results in children pestering their parents that can lead to the purchase of junk food.

“If I’ve seen it on an advert, and I’ve seen it in a shop I think to myself ‘Is that, is that already in the store? Because I really want that’ ... and I said: ‘Mum...’ Boy, Year 4b

- Children have a good level of nutritional knowledge, however they find that watching junk food advertising tempts them into eating unhealthy foods.

“I don’t normally think of [sweet] but when I see [sweet] I just want them!” Girl, Year 6b

This study shows the impact of these adverts over time.

Immediate effect – adverts can make children hungry and want to eat junk food.

“It kind of makes you feel like hungry because you think...when you see something tasty on TV it makes you ‘Oh I wish I had that’” Boy, Year 6b

Medium term effect – after seeing the adverts some children then pester their parents to buy junk food.

“My little sister, because she saw [sweet advert] and went straight to my mum and said: “Mummy can I please buy this? Can I please buy this? Can I please buy this?” Girl, Year 6b

Long term effect – in the supermarket children can remember the adverts and then want to buy those specific products.

²⁰ VoxEU.org – CEPR’s policy portal, [The effects of banning advertising in junk food markets](#), 31 March 2017

“You maybe see an advert and then you like forget about it ... but then you see it in the shops ... and you remember the advert and like you say “Oh are we going to have that?” Boy, Primary 5c²¹

5.2 Stakeholder and regulator views

The Health Committee Childhood Obesity Follow-Up Inquiry provided an opportunity for a number of stakeholders to provide evidence on the Government’s childhood obesity plan. It published its report in March 2017. With regards to advertising rules, the Committee said it welcomed the new rules introduced on non-broadcast media but highlighted disappointment from a range of groups. The Committee reported that, in written submissions to the Inquiry, “the Association of Directors of Public Health, the British Medical Association, Cancer Research UK, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the Children’s Food Trust and the Children’s Food Campaign all express disappointment that further action has not been taken on advertising and marketing of unhealthy food and drink.”²²

The Obesity Health Alliance (OHA) is a group of organisations working to prevent obesity-related ill-health, these include the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, British Dental Association and the Children’s Food Campaign. In response to the recent changes to advertising rules for non-broadcast media, the OHA said:

The new rules acknowledge it is wrong to advertise junk food to children, but only take a small step in the right direction. For too long children have been relentlessly bombarded with junk food adverts online, on billboards outside schools and at the cinema.

But just like the problems with current TV rules, we are concerned they don’t go far enough and loopholes mean they only apply when over 25% of the audience is children. This will be impossible to monitor and mean millions of children will still be exposed to adverts which we know lead them to unhealthy food choices. We need rules that are fit for purpose and reflect the way our children watch and engage with media online and on TV.²³

The Food and Drink Federation, the organisation that represents the food and drink industry in the UK, welcomed the new CAP rules on non-broadcast HFSS advertising. The Director General of the FDF, Ian Wright said:

“We fully support and welcome this landmark move in UK advertising which will end the advertising of foods and drinks high in fat, sugar or salt (HFSS) in media targeted at children, including online. Two years ago, FDF announced its backing for major changes to the way food and drink is advertised, based on our belief that non-broadcasting advertising rules should be in line with the strict rules already in place for TV.

²¹ Camille Aznar, Andy MacGregor, Gillian Rosenberg, Lauren Porter and Hayley Lepps (2016) [Ad Brake: Primary school children’s perceptions of unhealthy food advertising on TV](#). National Centre for Social Research and Cancer Research UK.

²² House of Commons Health committee, [Childhood obesity: follow-up Seventh Report of Session 2016–17, March 2017](#)

²³ Obesity Health Alliance, [OHA on new rules restricting junk food advertising to children](#), June 2017

HFSS food and drink ads have long been banned on children's TV, with under-16s today seeing far fewer of these ads than in recent years. As young people move away from traditional media towards new and social media, we feel it's important that ad rules keep up with this change.

UK food and drink companies have a high compliance rate with advertising rules. The FDF have been and will continue to work with the ASA, AA and other partners, to make sure advertisers understand how to meet these new requirements which represent a major shift in the UK advertising regime. Just last month we published a webinar with CAP to help advertisers as well as the public understand the new regulations, which we see as a step in the right direction towards tackling the complex issue of obesity. "²⁴

The Health Committee took oral evidence from the Director of the Committees of Advertising Practice (CAP) as part of its follow-up inquiry on childhood obesity:

Shahriar Coupal, Director of the Committees of Advertising Practice, relied on three main arguments in defending the Committees' decision not to implement Public Health England's proposals:

1. the public health benefits were uncertain;
2. the cost of extra regulation was too great; and
3. further restrictions such as the 9pm watershed were "blunt instruments" which would represent an unwarranted restriction on programming watched by adults and on commercial free speech.

To back up these arguments, he referred mainly to research on TV advertising of products high in fat, salt and sugar conducted by Ofcom between 2004 and 2007.

On the public health benefits, he said

Ofcom found from its research that there was only a modest direct influence on children's food preferences arising from TV advertising. Therefore, if one were to eliminate all HFSS advertising from the schedule, one would be eliminating only a modest direct influence on their preferences. Clearly, it was unwarranted to have such a level of restriction, and that was why it concluded overall that a certain restriction on children's programming was appropriate.

Later, he expanded a little on that point:

The evidence suggests that [advertising] has a modest impact on children's food preferences and some link with children's diets, but it falls well short of establishing a link with obesity. The calculation that seeing ads equals obesity is simply not proven. The multiple and complex factors that cause obesity—parental policy, schools policies, public understanding of nutrition and so on—are perhaps much more in the dock than advertising.

On the cost of regulation, he said

²⁴ FDF, [Food industry welcomes new rules on advertising coming into force](#), June 2017

Ofcom calculated that a 9 pm restriction would lead to a loss of broadcast revenue to the tune of £211 million net. Clearly, that has consequences for UK original programming, including children's programming [...] Restrictions beyond those [Ofcom] proposed around children's programmes would not be merited on the basis that public health outcomes from further restrictions were uncertain and the loss of revenue to broadcasters was too great, with a potential reduction in UK-originated programming, including children's programming.

Responding to questioning about the proposal to restrict HFSS advertising to after the 9pm watershed, he argued

Ofcom was [...] concerned about the blunt instrument of a 9 pm watershed. As you may know, Ofcom licenses 1,200 channels, the vast majority of which do not have any child audience, or a negligible child audience, and to impose a 9 pm restriction on those would be simply unwarranted. [...] Ofcom was very concerned that any regulation should not have any unwarranted intrusion into adult viewing time. That would also be our concern in relation to non-broadcast advertising.²⁵

5.3 Government response

A recent Government response on advertising rules for HFSS were set out in a January 2018 response to the Health Committee childhood obesity follow-up inquiry report.

The Committee stated that:

Whilst we welcome the changes introduced by the Committee on Advertising Practice, we urge a re-examination of the case for further restrictions on advertising of high fat, salt and sugar food and drink in the light of the most recent research not only on the effect of such advertising, but on the scale and consequences of childhood obesity. We intend to return to this subject following publication of the first set of monitoring data in March 2018.²⁶

The Government response highlighted that it welcomed the new rules on HFSS advertising in non-broadcast media, and that the restrictions on the advertising of these products in the UK are one of the strictest in the world:

The Government also welcomes the announcement by the Committee of Advertising Practice on the introduction of new rules on advertising. Current advertising restrictions in the UK on high fat, salt or sugar (HFSS) products are among the toughest in the world. Strict new rules came into effect on 1 July 2017 banning the advertising of HFSS food or drink products in children's media. These restrictions apply across all non-broadcast media including in print, cinema, online and in social media.

Advertisements for HFSS products are also not allowed to use promotions, licensed characters and celebrities popular with children. However, advertisers can use these techniques to better promote healthier options.

²⁵ House of Commons Health committee, [Childhood obesity: follow-up Seventh Report of Session 2016–17, March 2017](#)

²⁶ House of Commons Health Committee, [Childhood obesity: follow-up Seventh Report of Session 2016–17, March 2017](#)

The advertising codes are intended to reflect the best available evidence of the effect of advertising on the public, and are periodically reviewed to ensure they remain fit for purpose and based on the best available evidence. Monitoring data available in March 2018 will be one important part of this overall picture.

The restrictions on food and drink advertising put in place to protect children are based on a tool called a Nutrient Profile. Each food and drink is assigned a score based on how much sugar, fat, salt, fruit, vegetables and nuts, fibre and protein it contains, which helps to determine whether individual products should or should not be advertised to children. The Government committed to updating the current Nutrient Profile Model in the childhood obesity plan to ensure it reflects the latest Government dietary guidelines. PHE is working with academics, industry, health non-Governmental organisations and other stakeholders to deliver on this commitment and will consult on the updated model in early 2018.

Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation¹¹, published in 2015, committed Government to continue to discuss with sports the scope for voluntary agreements on HFSS food sponsorship. Working with Department of Health, PHE, the Sport and Recreation Alliance and sports organisations, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport developed a set of principles for sports bodies to consider when entering into relationships that relate to HFSS products. These principles were set out in Sport England's wider guidance to sports bodies on commercial sponsorship in May 2017. This included ensuring monies received are reinvested into developing and promoting sport and providing information to consumers on the content of food and drink available at sporting events.²⁷

²⁷ Department of Health and Social Care, [Government response to 'Childhood obesity: follow-up' report](#), 11 January 2017

6. News items

Guardian

7 December 2017

Child obesity campaigners in row over new report's lack of teeth

Centre for Social Justice accused of omitting key recommendations to the benefit of the food industry over the health of youngsters

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/dec/07/child-obesity-campaigners-in-row-over-new-reports-lack-of-teeth>

BBC News Online

28 November 2017

Children 'bombed by junk food' ads on family shows

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-42150452>

Telegraph

26 October 2017

SNP plan to tackle Scotland's obesity crisis by restricting supermarket offers and restaurant meal sizes

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/10/26/snp-plan-tackle-scotlands-obesity-crisis-restricting-supermarket/>

British Medical Journal

11 October 2017

Spending on junk food advertising is nearly 30 times what government spends on promoting healthy eating

BMJ 2017; 359 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.j4677> Cite this as: BMJ 2017;359:j4677

<http://www.bmj.com/content/359/bmj.j4677>

Financial Times [subscription]

12 June 2017

Online junk food advertising ban welcomed

<https://www.ft.com/content/00185bce-5cd2-11e7-9bc8-8055f264aa8b>

Guardian

4 May 2017

UK must get tough on childhood obesity, says top doctors

Obesity Health Alliance issues 10-point action plan in hope of influencing party manifestos for general election

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/may/04/uk-must-be-tougher-on-tackling-childhood-obesity-doctors-alliance-manifesto-health-alliance>

Independent

8 December 2016

Ban on junk food advertising aimed at children extended to online and social media

Changes bring print, cinema and online and social media into line with television, where strict regulation prohibits the advertising of unhealthy food to children

<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/junk-food-ads-children-advertising-banned-ban-online-social-media-ofcom-a7462521.html>

Guardian

12 November 2016

Curbs on junk food ads No 1 priority in fighting childhood obesity, says study

Group of 73 health and obesity experts call for ban before 9pm watershed, restrictions online and end of sports sponsorship

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/nov/12/stop-junk-food-advertising-curb-childhood-obesity-experts>

Guardian

5 July 2016

Junk food TV ads make children hungry and tempted, charity finds

Cancer Research UK survey of children's responses reinforces calls for obesity strategy to include stricter advertising curbs

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jul/05/junk-food-ads-children-cancer-research-obesity-advertising>

7. Press releases

Scottish Government

26 October 2017

Time for bold action on obesity: Consultation on new strategy for a healthier future.

The promotion of unhealthy food and drink is to be restricted as part of Scotland's new diet and obesity strategy.

Public Health Minister Aileen Campbell has launched a consultation on ambitious plans to help people lose weight, including:

- Measures to restrict the promotion and advertising of food and drink high in fat, sugar and salt
- Over £40 million new investment to deliver almost 100,000 supported weight management interventions for people with, or at risk of, Type 2 diabetes
- Supporting calls to ban broadcast advertising of foods high in fat, salt and sugar before the 9pm watershed

Ms Campbell said:

Obesity significantly increases the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, cancer cardiovascular disease and depression. Simply put, it's harming the people of Scotland. It also puts pressure on the NHS, other public services and our economy.

That is why we need commitment and action from everyone across all sectors and at all levels including government, citizens, the public sector and businesses right across the country.

We are putting forward a package of bold measures designed to help people make healthier choices, empower personal change and show real leadership. Now we need people who live, work and consume food and drink in Scotland to tell us what they think.

As with our ground-breaking strategies on alcohol and tobacco, this is the start of a progressive plan of action, learning from our experience in Scotland and further afield, that will make a real, lasting difference to the country's health.

The Minister launched the consultation at Tynecastle stadium, where she met participants in the SPFL Trust's Football Fans in Training (FFIT) weight management programme.

Wattie Buchan, who lost four stone after suffering five heart attacks, said:

I was miserable before. I've had five heart attacks, I've had a quadruple bypass. My life was terrible. This is the best I've felt in four years, I feel better within myself being fitter.

Twelve weeks ago I could hardly walk. I've been doing this for five weeks and now I walk a lot – even my dog has lost weight.

It's totally changed my life around. It's made a massive difference to how I feel; I feel better mentally as well. It's like night and day; I am loving it.

The [consultation](#) will run from 26 October to 31 January

Obesity Health Alliance

Health costs of obesity soaring as junk food companies pour millions into advertising

11 October 2017

- Top spending crisp, confectionary and sugary drinks brands put over £143 million[\[1\]](#) a year into advertising their products
- This dwarfs the £5.2 million[\[2\]](#) annual spend on Government's flagship healthy eating campaign
- Meanwhile the NHS spends an estimated £38 million[\[3\]](#) a year on weight loss surgery

Money spent last year on junk food advertising in the UK far outweighs the amount Government is able to spend on healthy eating campaigns, leading to an unbalanced environment pushing us towards unhealthy choices, according to new analysis by the Obesity Health Alliance (OHA) published on World Obesity Day.

Junk food brands are spending 27.5 times more on advertising their products than the amount available for the Government's flagship healthy eating campaign – and as obesity rates soar, the NHS is having to spend more dealing with the consequences, with weight loss surgery alone costing an estimated six times the amount spent on the Change 4 Life campaign.

The UK's obesity epidemic threatens to cripple the NHS financially, whilst putting the health of the nation at risk, says the group of more than 40 leading health charities, medical royal colleges and campaign groups. The OHA is calling on Government to close existing loopholes to restrict children's exposure to junk food marketing across all media, including on TV prior to the 9pm watershed. There is clear evidence of the impact of junk food marketing on obesity – with a recent study by Cancer Research UK[\[4\]](#) finding that adverts make children 'hungry' and 'tempted.'

Latest figures show that:

- The top 18 spending crisp, confectionary and sugary drinks brands put over £143 million a year into advertising
- Government spent £5.2m last year on its Change4Life healthy eating campaign
- The NHS spends an estimated £38 million a year on weight loss surgery – although surgery can be cost saving in the longer term
- Treating obesity relating conditions is estimated to cost the NHS £5.1 billion a year[\[5\]](#)

Caroline Cerny, OHA Lead, said:

It's like a very unbalanced diet – with children's health getting a raw deal. Junk food companies are spending tens of millions of pounds a year on promoting their products. Government healthy eating campaigns can't possibly compete. There's only ever going to be one winner – so it's not surprising that the cost of obesity both to people's health, the NHS and wider society, is spiralling out of control. Something needs to be done urgently to redress the balance.

The OHA also wants to see marketing rules extended to cover sponsorship of sports, family attractions and marketing communications in schools.

Malcolm Clark, Coordinator of the Children's Food Campaign added:

Investing in prevention is important – the fewer people who are overweight or obese, the fewer obesity related conditions they will suffer and the less cost there will be to the NHS. The soft drinks industry levy and reformulation programmes are key to changing the nation's diet, but without more effective restrictions on junk food advertising, any attempts to promote healthy living are never going to work.

The role of advertising in driving us towards unhealthy foods cannot be underestimated, especially when it comes to children. This is why chocolate and crisps brands are pumping millions into advertising every year. We need the Government to go further to protect children from junk food marketing and to safeguard their future health and to avoid having to spend millions dealing with the consequences down the line.

[1] Top 100 HFSS brands in 2016

– <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/attachment?storycode=550799&atttype=T&atcode=113157>

[2] ChangeForLife 2016 budget as confirmed by Public Health England

[3] Initial cost of weight loss surgery to NHS is around £6,000

(<https://www.nice.org.uk/news/article/offer-weight-loss-surgery-to-diabetics>). In 2015/16, there were 6,438 Finished Consultant Episodes (FCE's) in NHS hospitals with a primary diagnosis of obesity and a main or secondary procedure of bariatric surgery (<http://www.content.digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB23742>)

[4] <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-us/cancer-news/press-release/2016-07-05-junk-food-advertising-is-too-tempting-for-children>

[5] Scarborough P, Bhatnagar P, Wickramasinghe KK et al. *The economic burden of ill health due to diet, physical inactivity, smoking, alcohol and obesity in the UK: an update to 2006/07 NHS costs. J Public Health (Oxon) 2011;33(4):527-35.*

Food Foundation

Scotland breaks new ground with proposed ban on promotion of junk food

October 2017

Last week was a big week for those of us interested in obesity and food policy, with the release of the [Scottish Government's draft Obesity Plan](#). The Food Foundation did a [brief analysis](#) to see how it measures up to [HM Government's strategy on childhood obesity](#) released August 2016. While HM Government's plan is only focused on children, and Scotland's scope is much wider, both have been led by public health but have aspects which cut across several departments. The Scottish plan addresses and sets out clear actions on an impressively wide range of factors that are contributing to obesity: food promotions, advertising and labelling, the nutritional quality of food made and sold in a variety of settings, setting the stage for a healthy diet early in childhood, and improving how obesity prevention is incorporated into health services, among others.

In several instances Scotland wants to make sure that UK wide programmes work harder to deliver impact (e.g. ensuring there is transparency on how sugar tax funds are allocated, and ensuring Healthy Start is tailored to Scottish needs). Most notably Scotland wants to push hard for a ban on advertising of HFSS foods up to the 9pm watershed (something which was top of the list of recommendations in the [Food Environment Policy Index](#) we developed for England).

But there's some new and exciting proposals in this plan as well, most notably plans to restrict multi-buy and other promotions on unhealthy foods and drinks. This is very important as [PHE's analysis](#) shows that we buy 40% of our food and drink on promotion and they estimate it causes us to buy 20% more in the category on promotion than we otherwise would. We are not aware of any other country with such restrictions, and there are none listed in WCRF's [NOURISHING database](#), so Scotland could be a leading example of the impact of getting rid of multi-buy and other promotions. Particularly as they're incorporating plans to monitor and evaluate the impact of their obesity plan.

It is really good to see that some of the initiatives within the plan come with proposed funding streams. Their £42m commitment, over five years, to supported weight management programmes, for example, sets a really high bar in backing up their intentions for turning this plan into action. It is also notable that they've included a section on city and urban planning, which although it isn't hugely developed or specific in its description, gives a positive signal that the government is taking on board recommendations to move obesity policy beyond those initiatives aimed at consumers and towards actually creating a healthier environment for citizens to live in.

In [our analysis](#) comparing the Scottish plan to HM Government's 2016 'Childhood Obesity: A Plan for Action', there are many broad commonalities and some key differences, particularly in the details. The

Scottish plan hasn't yet specified an end date, likely as it is still in proposal form, and specific plans for monitoring and evaluation have not been released. HM Government's plan aims to achieve its actions in 10 years (2016-2026), though no impact targets are set.

Both plans propose strengthening existing food labels and public sector procurement, include provisions for reformulation and physical activity and include/strengthen a sugary drinks levy. Both include some discussion of health inequalities, though the Scottish plan proposes stronger measures on this, and both recommend undertaking work on the Healthy Start programme. Notably absent from HM Government's plan are actions aimed at restricting advertising and promotions, as well as (urban) planning and specific descriptions of how the plan itself will be led, monitored and evaluated. And HM Government's plan has a larger emphasis on product development, reformulation and innovation compared to the Scottish plan, which takes a wider approach to obesity.

However, neither plan considers the potential role of agriculture policy in influencing the relative price of and access to different foods, such as fruit and vegetables. Given this is an area of policy which needs urgent attention while the Agriculture Bill is being drafted, this represents a significant missed opportunity. It's high time, government leaders in public health were working to influence the food we produce.

The draft Scottish plan is now open for consultation until 31 January 2017 at: <https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/a-healthier-future/>

Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

17 August 2017

Government childhood obesity plan one year on: end of year report says 'some good progress but must try harder'

Despite some good progress, 'must try harder' is the assessment of the Obesity Health Alliance (OHA) in a report card released today to mark one year since the launch of the Government's Childhood Obesity Plan. The OHA, which is made up of over 40 leading health charities, medical royal colleges and campaign groups, recognise the progress which has been made by the Government in the last year. However, it warns that more work is needed to tackle childhood obesity.

Singled out for praise is the introduction of the soft drinks industry levy, which has already led many drinks manufacturers to reduce sugar from their drinks, and the sugar reduction programme, led by Public Health England. Today's announcement of a calorie reduction programme of work was also welcomed by the OHA.

But OHA warns that the current plan does not do enough to tackle the relentless exposure of children to junk food advertising on TV and online and will not be enough to significantly reduce levels of childhood obesity which is currently at a devastating all-time high.

Caroline Cerny, Alliance Lead, said:

Good progress has been made over the last year with strong measures to reduce sugar from foods and drink and we look forward to seeing ambitious targets for industry to make the food we eat less calorific. However, we can't ignore the fact that the food industry continues to get away with bombarding children with adverts that we know encourage unhealthy food choices.

"The existing regulations are full of loopholes and don't reflect the way children watch TV or online content. Failing to tackle this area is significantly undermining the impact of the Childhood Obesity Plan. After one year, it is scraping along with a C grade, rather than topping the class with an A star.

OHA Steering Group member, Professor John Wass said:

2016 marked the launch of the Government's first comprehensive Childhood Obesity Plan. But 2016 was also the year childhood obesity rose to a new, ferocious high. As our children's waistlines continue to increase, so do their chances of developing devastating diseases such as Type 2 diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular and liver disease plus associated mental health problems.

The Government pitched this Obesity Plan as the start of the conversation. We agree this is just the start. The stronger elements of the plan are progressing well, but these alone are not enough. We now urgently need to resume that conversation, to give us the best chance of protecting our children's future health.

More than one in five children are already obese or overweight in their first year of primary school, rising to over one in three by the time they leave. The OHA demands that the Government ensures that every child has the best possible start in life. Their current reluctance to combat junk food advertising is a major concern to public health campaigners. Parents and families must be enabled to make healthy food choices. Our children deserve to grow up in a healthier environment.

Tackling Childhood Obesity: End of Year Report

The Obesity Health Alliance, a coalition of over 40 health organisations, has marked the Government's progress in tackling childhood obesity over the past year.

Overall in one year since the launch of the Government's Childhood Obesity Plan, some progress has been made in tackling childhood obesity but there are immediate areas for improvement.

With one in three children overweight or obese, significantly more effort needs to be made to protect their future health.

<p><i>Bringing in the Soft Drinks Industry Levy</i></p> <p>The Government has made excellent progress over the last year with the soft drinks industry levy agreed by Parliament and due to come into force in April 2018. Several soft drink manufacturers and retailers have already made promising moves to reduce sugar from their drinks.</p> <p>This policy has great potential to improve children's health.</p>	<p>Exceeding expectations</p> <p>Grade: A</p>
<p><i>Removing sugar, salt and saturated fat from everyday foods</i></p> <p>The sugar reduction programme led by Public Health England has got off to a promising start and we are looking forward to seeing clear results showing an initial 5% reduction in sugar from foods most commonly eaten by children in March 2018.</p> <p>To achieve the best results, this programme must be extended as soon as possible to include saturated fat and overall calories and must also include meaningful sanctions for companies who fail to meet the targets.</p>	<p>Meeting expectations – more work needed to achieve the best results</p> <p>Grade: B</p>
<p><i>Reducing junk food marketing to children</i></p> <p>It's disappointing that the Government has taken no action to close loopholes that allow children to be relentlessly bombarded with junk food adverts during peak family TV viewing time.</p> <p>Rules to restrict junk food adverts to children have finally been extended to cover online, cinemas and posters but these do not go far enough.</p>	<p>Below expectations – significantly more progress is needed in this area</p> <p>Grade: Fail</p>

Food and Drink Federation

30 June 2017

Food industry welcomes new rules on advertising coming into force

Following the introduction of new Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) rules banning the advertising of high fat, salt or sugar (HFSS) food or drink products in children's media from 1 July, Ian Wright CBE, Director General, Food and Drink Federation – the voice of UK manufacturers, said:

We fully support and welcome this landmark move in UK advertising which will end the advertising of foods and drinks high in fat, sugar or salt (HFSS) in media targeted at children, including online. Two years ago, FDF announced its backing for major changes to the way food and drink is advertised, based on our belief that non-broadcasting advertising rules should be in line with the strict rules already in place for TV.

HFSS food and drink ads have long been banned on children's TV, with under-16s today seeing far fewer of these ads than in recent years. As young people move away from traditional media towards new and social media, we feel it's important that ad rules keep up with this change.

UK food and drink companies have a high compliance rate with advertising rules. The FDF have been and will continue to work with the ASA, AA and other partners, to make sure advertisers understand how to meet these new requirements which represent a major shift in the UK advertising regime. Just last month we published a webinar with CAP to help advertisers as well as the public understand the new regulations, which we see as a step in the right direction towards tackling the complex issue of obesity.

Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

8 December 2016

New rules ban the advertising of high fat, salt and sugar food and drink products in children's media

Following a full public consultation, the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) has today announced tough new rules banning the advertising of high fat, salt or sugar (HFSS) food or drink products in children's media.

The rules, which have been designed to help protect the health and wellbeing of children, will apply across all non-broadcast media including in print, cinema and, crucially, online and in social media.

The rules, which will apply in media targeted at under-16s, will come into effect on 1 July 2017.

In summary:

- Ads that directly or indirectly promote an HFSS product cannot appear in children's media

- Ads for HFSS products cannot appear in other media where children make up over 25% of the audience
- Ads for HFSS products will not be allowed to use promotions, licensed characters and celebrities popular with children; advertisers may now use those techniques to better promote healthier options
- The Department of Health nutrient profiling model will be used to classify which products are HFSS

Responding to the announcement, Professor Neena Modi, President of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), said:

I am delighted that following the publication of draft legislation on the soft drinks industry levy earlier this week, a ban on advertising foods high in salt, sugar and fat in children's media has now been announced by the Committees of Advertising Practice. This is another positive step forward in the fight to tackle the rising prevalence of overweight and obesity in children, and the damaging health effects of junk food and fizzy drinks.

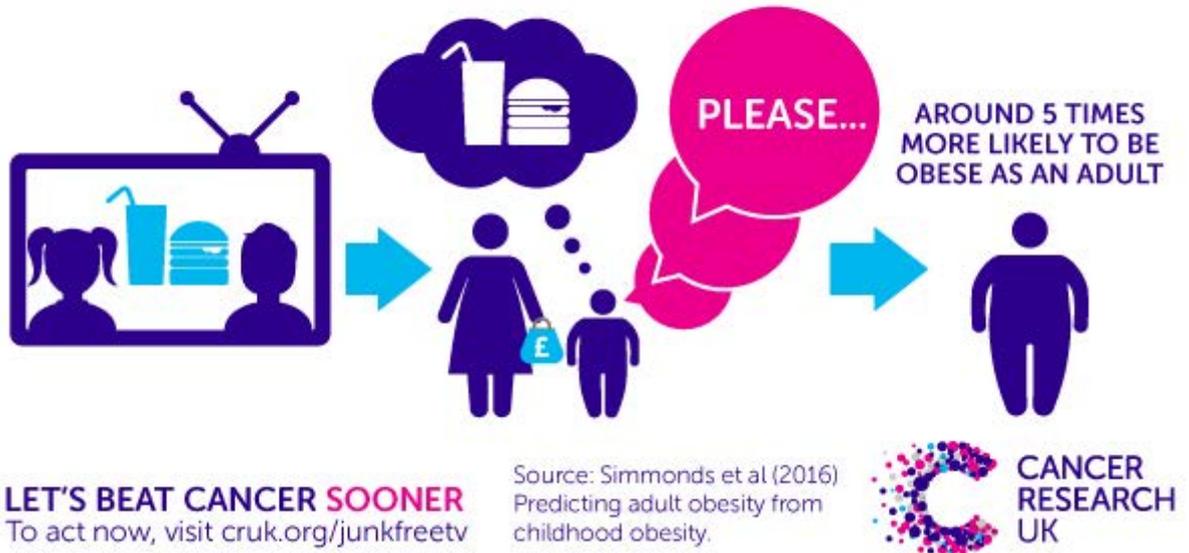
Children are influenced a great deal by advertising. There are shows which are not specifically targeted at children, that draw in thousands of children every week, and often have fast food adverts shown multiple times over the course of the broadcast. With over a fifth of children in the UK overweight or obese when they start primary school and a third by the time they reach year six, surely it is time for Government to strengthen rules around all advertising, and in particular ban the advertising of foods high in salt, sugar and fat on television before the 9pm watershed.

Cancer Research UK

Junk food advertising is too tempting for children

5 July 2016

HOW DO ADVERTS IMPACT CHILDREN'S OBESITY?



Children describe junk food advertising as 'tempting' and 'addictive', and say they could 'lick the screen', according to a new report* from Cancer Research UK.

"The rise in children's obesity is a huge concern and a growing epidemic. There must be no delay in taking action" - Alison Cox, director of prevention

The study looked at how junk food advertising can influence children's eating habits and food choices.

Researchers talked to children aged between 8 and 12 years old at six schools. Each group was shown two TV adverts for junk food, followed by a discussion.

Many of the children said they liked watching funny and engaging adverts and could recall advertising theme tunes. They also said they saw adverts during family TV time, saying they watched TV from 'around about seven o'clock till eight or nine'.

And the researchers believe that by using celebrities, bright colours, and funny voices, advertisements are able to attract children and influence their eating habits.

"You might be eating a piece of fruit, you might see the advert, and you might just throw it in the bin and ask your mum for money and leg it to the shop," said a boy, year 6, from Northamptonshire during the discussion.

A girl in primary 5 from North Lanarkshire, after watching a TV commercial for sweets, said: "It makes you feel as if you're happy and

excited and it feels like you want to try it because the guy's dancing in it because he's eaten it and it tastes good."

Most children said they had asked their parents for things they had seen on TV, particularly new junk food products, flavours or eye catching pack designs.

"I asked my mum if I could have it and she said no and I was annoyed and I kept trying and she finally said yes and I got to go to the shops to get it," explained a girl in primary 5, from Edinburgh.

More than one in five children in England are overweight or obese before they start primary school. By the time they leave, this increases to one in three.

Recent polling shows that 74 per cent of the UK public back a ban on advertising junk food on TV before 9pm.**

Dr Jyotsna Vohra, head of the Policy Research Centre for Cancer Prevention at Cancer Research UK, said:

It's worrying to hear that children associate junk food with having a better time and it's clear from the discussions that advertising can influence how they eat.

Most kids said that adverts made them feel hungry and in many cases it had a direct effect, with some children more likely to 'plead', 'nag' or 'beg' their parents after seeing an advert.

Alison Cox, director of prevention at Cancer Research UK, said:

It's clear the restrictions already in place during children's TV shows aren't enough. Children are watching junk food adverts during family programmes where these restrictions don't apply.

The rise in children's obesity is a huge concern and a growing epidemic. There must be no delay in taking action. We know that obese children are around five times more likely to be obese adults, and obese adults are more likely to develop cancer. {Ofcom, 2007 #110}This is why we need regulations to stop junk food advertising on TV before the 9pm watershed to give children a better chance of a healthy life.

Notes to Editor

* Cancer Research UK report: Ad Brake: Primary school children's perceptions of unhealthy food advertising on TV

** All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,774 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 25th - 26th January 2016. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+). Funded by Cancer Research UK.

Link to Junk Free TV

Campaign: <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/support-us/campaign-for-us/junk-free-tv>

8. Parliamentary Questions

[Obesity: Children](#)

Asked by: Ruane, Chris

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what assessment he has made of the effect of targeting food and drink advertising at children and young people on the level of childhood obesity.

Answering member: Steve Brine | Department: Department of Health

Public Health England's 2015 report 'Sugar reduction: The evidence for action' is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sugar-reduction-from-evidence-into-action>

The report showed that all forms of advertising and marketing, including advertising on television, through social and other online media, increase the preference, choice, purchasing and consumption of high sugar foods and drinks by children. Consuming a diet high in sugar leads to weight gain and therefore contributes to childhood obesity.

HC Deb 12 December 2017 | PQ 117281

[Food: Marketing](#)

Asked by: Green, Kate

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment her Department has made of the effect on children's health of restricting the marketing of high in fat, salt or sugar foods before the 9pm watershed.

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, whether her Department plans to strengthen existing regulations on the marketing of foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar to children before the 9pm watershed.

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what discussions she has had with broadcasters on restricting the marketing of foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar to children before the 9pm watershed.

Answering member: Matt Hancock | Department: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

Current advertising restrictions in the UK on high fat, salt or sugar (HFSS) products are among the toughest in the world. Strict new rules came into effect on 1 July banning the advertising of HFSS food or drink products in children's media. These restrictions apply across all non-broadcast media including in print, cinema, online and in social media.

In August we announced £5 million investment to fund a national institute for obesity research policy unit to provide a robust evidence base and deeper understanding of the causes of childhood obesity, including marketing to children and families. The unit's findings will be fed into the department's future policy development and engagement.

HC Deb 19 October 2017 | PQ 108086; PQ 107444; PQ 107438

[Fast Food: Advertising](#)

Asked by: Ruane, Chris

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what recent assessment he has made of the effect of junk food advertising on levels of obesity among children and young people.

Answering member: Steve Brine | Department: Department of Health

There has been no assessment made of the effect of fast food advertising on levels of obesity among children and young people.

In October 2015, Public Health England published its review 'Sugar reduction: The evidence for action: A mixed method review of behaviour changes resulting from marketing strategies targeted at high sugar food and non-alcoholic drinks'. This review found that all forms of advertising are effective in influencing the preference and purchase of high sugar foods and non-alcoholic drinks and increasing their consumption. New forms of advertising including, advergames, discounting, use of character branding, product size and supermarket product placement, can influence high sugar product selection or consumption. It would be difficult to assess the impact of one strategy in isolation as individuals are exposed to a whole variety of marketing strategies across various different mediums.

HC Deb 19 July 2017 | PQ 4681

[Unhealthy Food](#)

Asked by: Natalie McGarry (Glasgow East) (Ind)

What assessment he has made of the potential effectiveness of introducing (a) a ban on price-cutting promotions on unhealthy food in supermarkets and (b) restrictions on advertising of unhealthy food during family television programmes in reducing childhood obesity.

Answered by: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Nicola Blackwood) | Department: Health

In developing the childhood obesity plan, we considered the latest research and evidence on promotions and advertising, including Public Health England's evidence package "Sugar reduction: the evidence for action". We have made no secret of the fact that we considered a range of policies before finally settling on those set out in the childhood obesity plan. The plan includes the soft drinks industry levy and taking

20% of sugar out of certain products. We concluded that our plan is the right approach to secure the future health of our children.

Natalie McGarry

I associate myself with the Secretary of State's words of sympathy for the people of Berlin, and I also add my thoughts for the people of Aleppo, Yemen, Gaza, Mosul and all the forgotten conflicts of the world.

Public health experts have dismissed the Government's obesity strategy as a weak approach and a wasted opportunity. The Government say that they are committed to evidence-based policy making, but they have failed to acknowledge that relying on voluntary food action without tackling cost and availability is inherently flawed. Will the Minister commit the Government to getting a grip and bringing forward a ban or restrictions on advertising and price-cutting promotions on junk food?

Nicola Blackwood

I am happy to reassure the hon. Lady that current restrictions on advertising in the UK are already among the toughest in the world. For example, there is a total ban on the advertising of less healthy food during children's television programmes. Those have been shown to be very effective. However, we also welcome action that has been taken by forward-thinking retailers on promotions elsewhere. In particular, Sainsbury's has committed to removing multi-buy promotions across its full range of branded and own-brand soft drinks, confectionery, biscuits and crisps, removing more than 50% of its multi-buy promotions from its grocery business while lowering regular prices for products. It should be congratulated on leading the way.

Mr Speaker

We now feel considerably better informed.

Mr Alan Mak

Advertising agencies and industry bodies can play a key role in ensuring that adverts are appropriate. Will the Minister continue working with the industry to tackle child obesity?

Nicola Blackwood

Yes.

Margaret Ferrier

Certain supermarkets persist in placing less healthy foods on promotion near the entrances to their stores, where they are unavoidable. Does the Minister agree that it is not just at checkouts that healthy options should be promoted, and that retailers should exercise more responsibility?

Nicola Blackwood

I absolutely agree that putting healthier options near checkouts and helping people to make healthier choices are part of retailers'

responsibilities. What has been notable in my discussions with retailers is that the penny is starting to drop that this is the direction of travel and what the public want, and I think we are going to start seeing a real sea change in the way retailers are advertising.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker

Let us hear the sound of Shipley— Mr Philip Davies.

Philip Davies

May I urge the Minister not to go down this ridiculous nanny-state route—which one would not expect from a Conservative Government—of setting up an unhealthy food police to go round telling people what they should be eating and what they should not be eating? No food eaten as part of a balanced diet is in itself particularly unhealthy. If the Government are so concerned about families that are just about managing, why on earth would they even contemplate increasing costs for working families?

Nicola Blackwood

My hon. Friend flatters me by saying he thinks I am a nanny—it is really quite a disturbing thought. However, what we have here is an obesity plan that balances the need to cut the sugar in young people's diets, as a way to make sure they get a healthy diet, and individual choice, which we know is absolutely a Conservative ideal.

HC Deb 20 December 2016 | PQ 907987 | Vol 618 cc1306-7

9. Useful links and further reading

Advertising Standards Agency *Food: HFSS Overview* 29 June 2017

<https://www.asa.org.uk/advice-online/food-hfss-overview.html>

Obesity Health Alliance *A Watershed Moment: Why it's Prime Time to Protect Children from Junk Food Adverts* November 2017

<http://obesityhealthalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/A-Watershed-Moment-report.pdf>

Food Foundation *UK's restrictions on junk food advertising to children* July 2017

https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/3-Briefing-UK-Junk-Food_v3.pdf

Cabinet Office, Department of Health and Social Care, HM Treasury, and Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street *Childhood obesity: a plan for action* January 2017

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childhood-obesity-a-plan-for-action>

Public Health England *Health matters: obesity and the food environment* March 2017

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-obesity-and-the-food-environment>

Scottish Government Consultation *A healthier future - action and ambitions on diet, activity and healthy weight* 26 October 2017 - 31 January 2018

<https://consult.gov.scot/health-and-social-care/a-healthier-future/>

Cancer Research UK *Ad Brake: Primary school children's perceptions of unhealthy food advertising on TV* July 2016

https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/sites/default/files/ad_brake_report.pdf

House of Commons Health Select Committee *Childhood obesity—brave and bold action HC465* November 2015

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmhealth/465/465.pdf>

Government Response, Cm 9330 September 2016

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/552056/HSC_response_9_9_16.pdf

Childhood obesity: follow-up, HC928 March 2017

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhealth/928/928.pdf>

Government response, Cm9531 January 2018

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-childhood-obesity-follow-up-report>

World Health Organization; Regional Office for Europe, *Tackling food marketing to children in a digital world: trans-disciplinary perspectives*, 2016

<http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/nutrition/publications/2016/tackling-food-marketing-to-children-in-a-digital-world-trans-disciplinary-perspectives.-childrens-rights.-evidence-of-impact.-methodological-challenges.-regulatory-options-and-policy-implications-for-the-who-european-region-2016>

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