

New advertising rules to help tackle childhood obesity

- These restrictions will help protect children from developing long-term unhealthy eating habits and improve nation's health, and forms just one part of wider plans to tackle childhood obesity.
- Latest measures to tackle childhood obesity could wipe over seven billion calories from the national diet every year.

The health of children across the UK will be improved as new restrictions will mean they are less exposed to advertising of unhealthy foods, the government has announced today.

Following a public consultation, regulations will come into force at the end of next year to introduce a 9pm watershed for advertisements of foods high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS).

The new rules apply to TV and UK on-demand programmes, as well as restrictions on paid-for advertising of HFSS foods online as part of the government's ongoing commitment to tackle unhealthy eating habits at source.

The watershed will apply from 9pm to 5.30am, meaning HFSS adverts can only be shown during these times. A total of 79% of public consultation respondents supported a 9pm watershed on TV while 74% agreed with the introduction of further HFSS advertising restrictions online.

Childhood obesity is a complex problem, caused by different factors, and the government is committed to a wide set of actions. Today's vital change represents another important step forward in the government's drive to reduce childhood obesity and level up health inequalities across the nation.

Public Health Minister, Jo Churchill, said:

We are committed to improving the health of our children and tackling obesity. The content youngsters see can have an impact on the choices they make and habits they form. With children spending more time online it is vital we act to protect them from unhealthy advertising.

These measures form another key part of our strategy to get the nation fitter and healthier by giving them the chance to make more informed decisions when it comes to food. We need to take urgent action to level up health inequalities. This action on advertising will help to wipe billions off the national calorie count and give our children a fair chance of a healthy lifestyle.

In order to keep the restrictions proportional, these new regulations will apply to food and drink products of most concern to childhood obesity and

will ensure the healthiest in each category will be able to continue to advertise. This approach means foods such as honey, olive oil, avocados and marmite are excluded from the restrictions.

The restrictions will apply to all businesses with 250 or more employees that make and/or sell HFSS products, meaning small and medium businesses will be able to continue advertising. The government recognises these companies may be some of the hardest hit by the pandemic and rely on online media as the sole way to communicate with their customers.

Online restrictions will be limited to paid-for advertising, ensuring brands can continue to advertise within 'owned media' spaces online; such as a brand's own blog, website, app or social media page.

The TV and online restrictions could remove up to 7.2 billion calories from children's diets per year in the UK which, over the coming years, could reduce the number of obese children by more than 20,000.

One in three children leave primary school overweight or obese, with obesity-related illnesses costing the NHS £6 billion a year.

COVID-19 has further highlighted how important it is to tackle obesity, with excess weight being a risk factor for more severe disease.

Evidence shows exposure to HFSS advertising can affect when children eat and what they eat and, over time, excess calorie consumption can lead to children becoming overweight or obese.

The government estimates there were around 2.9 billion child HFSS TV impacts and 11 billion impressions online – defined as an individual seeing a single advert one time – in the UK in 2019.

Restricting the amount of these products advertised will encourage healthier food choices and will help to reduce the number of children living with obesity and going on to develop conditions associated with excess weight, such as type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, colorectal cancer, liver disease and breast cancer later in life.

The Office for Health Promotion – launching fully later this year – will lead national efforts to improve and level up the health of the nation by continuing the fight against obesity, improving mental health and promoting physical activity.

Current advertising regulations are not going far enough to protect children from seeing a significant amount of unhealthy food adverts on TV and existing regulation does not account for the increasing amount of time children are spending online.

Analysis from September 2019 demonstrated that almost half (47.6%) of all food adverts shown over the month on ITV1, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Sky1 were for products high in fat, salt and sugar, rising to nearly 60% between 6pm and 9pm. Ofcom research suggests that children's viewing peaks in the hours after school, with the largest number of child viewers concentrated around

family viewing time, between 6pm and 9pm.

The measures set out today form part of our legislative response to tackling obesity. The government is committed to working alongside industry and will issue guidance to help them prepare for this transition.

The [policy documents published](#) include:

- government's response to the 2019 and 2020 consultation
- an equalities impact assessment
- an impact assessment

The 7.2bn figure is derived from the multiplication of the predicted calorie reduction (taken from the impact assessment) and the estimated number of children positively influenced by HFSS advertising restrictions.

In TV advertising, an impact is defined as an individual seeing a single advert one time. For example, if 1 million children are watching a TV advert simultaneously this would result in 1 million child impacts for that advert. In online advertising, an impression is defined as an individual seeing a single advert one time. For example, if 2 million children were served the same advert (at any time) this would result in 2 million child impressions for that advert.

Products in scope of the advertising restrictions will include those of most concern to childhood obesity, defined as high in fat, salt and sugar and are determined through a two-step process. First the products will only be subject to the restrictions if they are in a narrowed set of categories listed in Annex 1 and 2 of the consultation response (based on Public Health England's sugar or calorie reduction programme or the soft drinks industry levy). Secondly, the 2004 to 2005 Nutrient Profiling Model (NPM) will be used to define whether a product is HFSS.