

UK to Ban Unhealthy Food Ads Aimed at Kids

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December 08, 2016

Adverts for unhealthy food targeted at children are being banned from all TV, cinema, radio, newspapers, magazines, online and on social media, to help tackle obesity.

Some regulations are already in place for TV ads but now the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) is bringing the rest of the media into line.

Almost a third of children in England aged 2 to 15 are now classed as overweight or obese.

As well as the advertising restrictions, the government is bringing in a 'sugar tax' levy on the soft drinks industry on high sugar products to help tackle child obesity.

High Fat, Salt or Sugar

The new bans begin in July 2017 and cover ads for high fat, salt or sugar food or drink products in children's media. The rules also cover media where more than a quarter of the audience are kids.

The restrictions also cover celebrity and TV and film character endorsements, but these methods will be allowed when promoting healthier choices.

It is thought the biggest impact will be online - with today's children spending more time online than they do sitting in front of the TV.

The advertising watchdog says ads only have a small impact on children's food choices - but health groups disagree. However, the watchdog does say the restrictions will play "a meaningful role in reducing potential harms to children."

In a statement, CAP chairman, James Best says: "Childhood obesity is a serious and complex issue and one that we're determined to play our part in tackling. These restrictions will significantly reduce the number of ads for high, fat, salt or sugar products seen by children. Our tough new rules are a clear demonstration that the ad industry is willing and ready to act on its responsibilities and puts the protection of children at the heart of its work."

Reaction

Reacting to the announcement of the new rules, the Obesity Health Alliance representing health groups and medical colleges issued a statement saying the ban may not go far enough: "We welcome CAP's long awaited rules to protect children from junk food marketing across all types of media and are pleased to see them recognise that restrictions should apply to kids up to the age of 16. But it's concerning that the new restrictions only apply when it can be shown that at least 25% of the audience are children. This loophole means that a significant number of children could still be exposed to adverts for high fat, salt and sugary products.

"Children aged 5-15 spend up to 15 hours a week online – so it's absolutely right that they're protected from junk food marketing. Research shows advertising greatly influences the food children choose to eat, and with one third of children overweight or obese by their eleventh birthday, we need to protect them from relentless junk food marketing in all walks of life."

Professor Neena Modi, president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, also issued a statement welcoming the ban. She says: "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."

SOURCES:

Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP)

Department of Health

Obesity Health Alliance

Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

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Cite this article: UK to Ban Unhealthy Food Ads Aimed at Kids - *Medscape* - Dec 08, 2016.

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