

The Obesity Health Alliance is a coalition of over 40 health charities, medical royal colleges and campaign groups working together to tackle obesity through evidence based policy. Collectively we all agree we need to reduce children’s exposure to junk food adverts to help reduce childhood obesity. Junk food adverts are adverts for products that are high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS). **We want existing regulations to be extended so that HFSS advertising is restricted until after the 9pm watershed.**

### **Junk food marketing is a problem**

- There is a clear link between food promotion and children’s food preferences, what they buy and what they eat.<sup>1</sup> Advertising also influences how much children eat,<sup>2</sup> and can lead to them ‘pestering’ parents to buy unhealthy products.<sup>3,4</sup>
- Children are a vulnerable audience who have the right to protection from advertising due to their limited ability to critically understand what advertising is.<sup>5</sup>
- The impact of brand recognition influences children’s behaviour from a very young age with research showing that children as young as 18 months can recognise brands, with preschool children demonstrating preferences for branded products.<sup>6</sup>
- The top 18 spending crisp, confectionary and sugary drinks brands spent over £143 million advertising their products in 2016<sup>7</sup> – dwarfing the annual spend of the Government’s flagship healthy eating campaign.

### **The current rules do not protect children**

- Existing rules meant to reduce children’s exposure to junk food adverts do not protect children from seeing adverts for food and drink products during the TV programmes they watch the most.
- The rules only apply to 26% of children’s viewing time.<sup>8</sup> The rules still allow HFSS adverts to be shown during ‘family viewing time’ between 6-9pm when the number of children watching TV is at its highest.<sup>8</sup>

### **Our findings: the extent of children’s exposure to junk food marketing<sup>9</sup>**

- OHA commissioned the University of Liverpool to analyse the adverts during TV shows popular with children in February 2017 to find out how many junk food adverts children see.
  1. The majority (59%) of food and drink adverts shown during family viewing time were for HFSS products and would be banned from children’s TV.
  2. In the worst case example, children were bombarded with nine junk food adverts in just a 30 minute period. This included adverts for pizza, burgers, crisps and biscuits.
  3. Adverts for fruit and vegetables made up just over 1% of food and drink adverts shown during family viewing time.
  4. Adverts for fast food and takeaways appeared more than twice as often as any other type of food and drinks adverts – largely due to their tactic of sponsoring popular family shows.
  5. Ultimately, our analysis shows that hundreds of thousands of children are being bombarded by HFSS adverts every time they watch their favourite programmes.

### **What are we calling for?**

- Current rules are failing to protect our children. Children need to be protected from exposure to adverts for HFSS foods and drinks that we know can influence their preferences, choices, and intake.
- The Government must take action to ensure the strongest restrictions apply to programming where the greatest numbers of children are exposed to HFSS advertising. We want existing regulations to be extended so that HFSS advertising is restricted until after the 9pm watershed.

### **Action in this area has support:**

- 76% of the public and 71% of MPs support restricting advertising of unhealthy food on TV before the 9pm watershed.
- In 2015, the Commons Health Select Committee included action on marketing as a key recommendation in their report, Childhood Obesity – brave and bold action.

### **Childhood obesity: what is the problem?**

- We have a childhood obesity epidemic in this country. Levels of overweight and obesity are at a devastating all-time high, with the most disadvantaged children significantly more likely to be overweight or obese.
  - More than one in five children are overweight or obese in their first year of primary school in England. This rises to over one in three by the time they leave primary school.<sup>10</sup>
  - Children living in the most deprived areas are more than twice as likely to be affected by obesity as those living in the least deprived areas.<sup>10</sup>
- Children with obesity are over five times more likely to be obese as adults.<sup>11</sup> This increases their risk of developing serious disease including Type 2 diabetes, cancer, heart and liver disease plus associated mental health problems, putting an enormous and unsustainable strain on the NHS.
  - The NHS is currently spending over £5.1 billion on obesity-related costs.<sup>12</sup>
  - Obesity is a major drain on the economy. McKinsey estimate the cost of obesity to employers in the UK to be £7 billion.<sup>13</sup>
- Our full report, 'A Watershed Moment: Why it's Prime Time to Protect Children from Junk Food Adverts' is available here: <http://obesityhealthalliance.org.uk/resources/>

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<sup>1</sup> Public Health England (October 2015). Sugar Reduction: the evidence for action

<sup>2</sup> Boyland E, Nolan S, Kelly B (2016). Advertising as a cue to consume: a systematic review and meta-analysis of the effects of acute exposure to unhealthy food and nonalcoholic beverage advertising on intake in children and adults *Am J Clin Nutr*

<sup>3</sup> Hastings, G. (2006) The extent, nature and effects of food promotion to children: a review of the evidence. WHO 16.

<sup>4</sup> McDermott L et al. (2006). International food advertising, pester power and its effects. *International Journal of Advertising*.

<sup>5</sup> EYoung B (2003). Does food advertising influence children's food choices? *International journal of Advertising*.

<sup>6</sup> Robinson TN et al. (2007) Effects of fast food branding on young children's taste preferences. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*.

<sup>7</sup> Top 100 HFSS brands in 2016 – <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/attachment?storycode=550799&atype=T&atcode=113157>

<sup>8</sup> Ofcom (2017). Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2017

<sup>9</sup> Obesity Health Alliance (2017). A Watershed Moment: Why it's Prime Time to Protect Children from Junk Food Adverts.

<sup>10</sup> NHS Digital (2016). National Child Measurement Programme - England, 2015-16.

<sup>11</sup> Simmonds M et al. (2016) Predicting adult obesity from childhood obesity: a systematic review and metaanalysis. *Obesity Reviews*.

<sup>12</sup> Scarborough P et al. (2011). The economic burden of ill health due to diet, physical inactivity, smoking, alcohol and obesity in the UK: an update to 2006/7 NHS costs. *J Public Health*.

<sup>13</sup> McKinsey Global Institute. 2014. Overcoming Obesity: an initial economic analysis