

[GB] Regulator to Ban Junk Food Advertising in Programmes of Particular Appeal to Children

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In December 2003, the Secretary of State asked the UK Office of Communications (Ofcom) to consider proposals to strengthen the rules on food and drink advertising to children. After extensive research and consultation, Ofcom has now reached a controversial decision to ban all advertisements for products that are high in fat, salt and sugar in and around all programmes of particular appeal to children under the age of 16, broadcast at any time of day or night on any channel.

This will include a total ban on such advertising in and around all children's programmes and on dedicated children's channels as well as in youth-oriented and adult programmes which attract a significantly higher than average proportion of viewers under the age of 16. The latter would include some specialist music programmes and some general entertainment programmes. In addition to these general prohibitions, new rules are to be introduced on the content of programmes targeted at primary school children (those under the age of 11). These will ban the use of celebrities and characters licensed from third-parties (such as cartoons), promotional activities such as free gifts, and health or nutrition claims, in the advertising of food products high in fat, salt and sugar. All restrictions will apply equally to product sponsorship, and will apply to all broadcasters licensed by Ofcom and based in the UK, including international broadcasters transmitting from the UK to audiences overseas.

The foods covered by the prohibition will be determined using the Nutrient Profiling Scheme developed by the UK Food Standards Agency. Brief further consultation will take place on the extension of the rules to cover children under 16 as the original proposals had only sought to cover those under 9. It is intended that the rules will take effect before the end of January 2007, although current advertising campaigns will be allowed to continue until the end of June 2007. For dedicated children's channels, which will find it more difficult than others to substitute revenues from food and drink advertising, the rules will be phased in over 24 months to the end of 2008. Ofcom estimates that, as a result of the new restrictions, the commercial public service broadcasters could lose up to 0.7% of their total revenues; children's and youth-oriented cable and satellite channels up to 8.8%, and dedicated children's channels up to 15%.

Ofcom Press Release 17/11/06, “New Restrictions on the Television Advertising of Food and Drink Products to Children”

http://www.ofcom.org.uk/media/news/2006/11/nr_20061117

